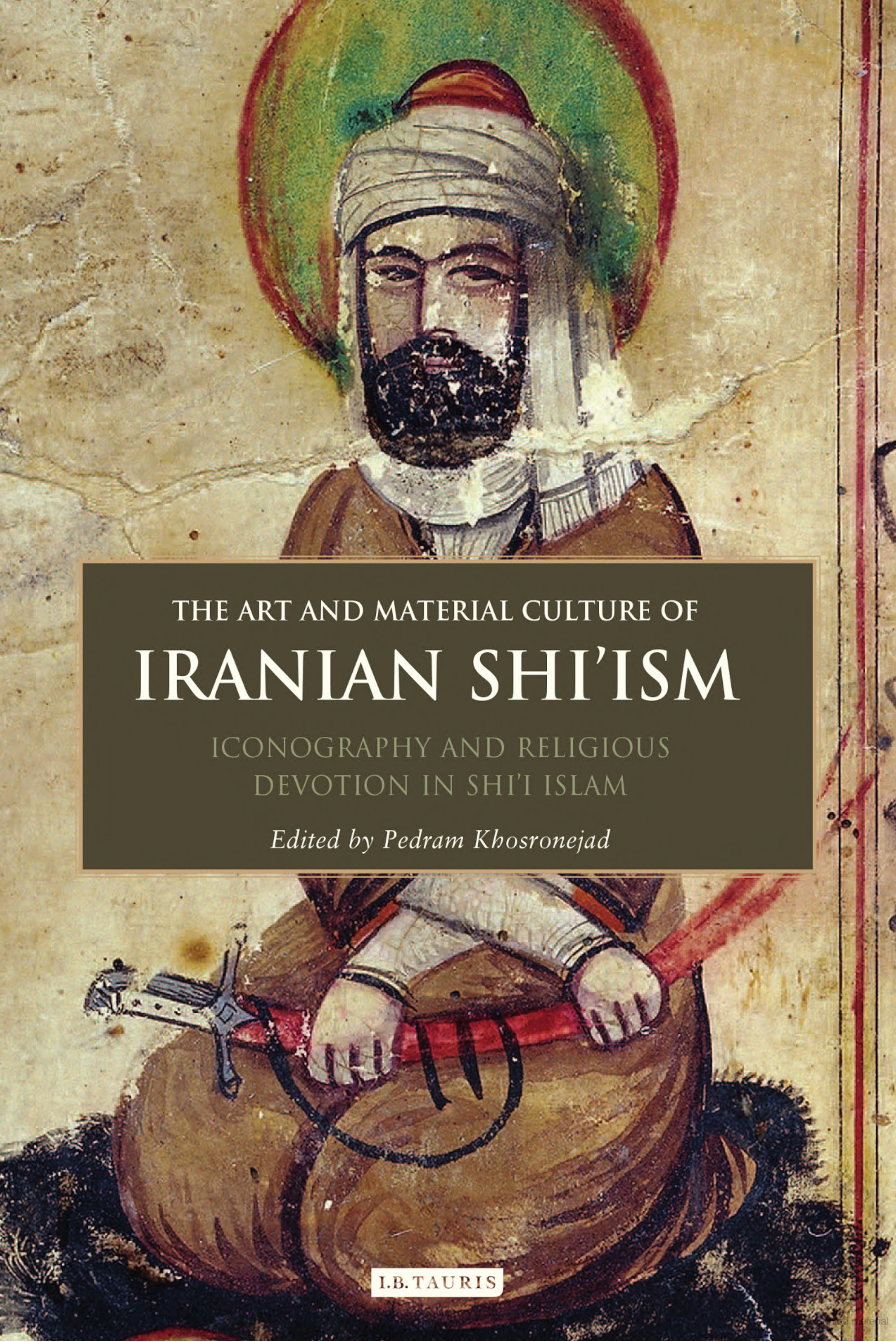


THE ART AND MATERIAL CULTURE OF IRANIAN SHI'ISM

ICONOGRAPHY AND RELIGIOUS DEVOTION IN SHI'I ISLAM

Edited by Pedram Khosronejad

I.B.TAURIS

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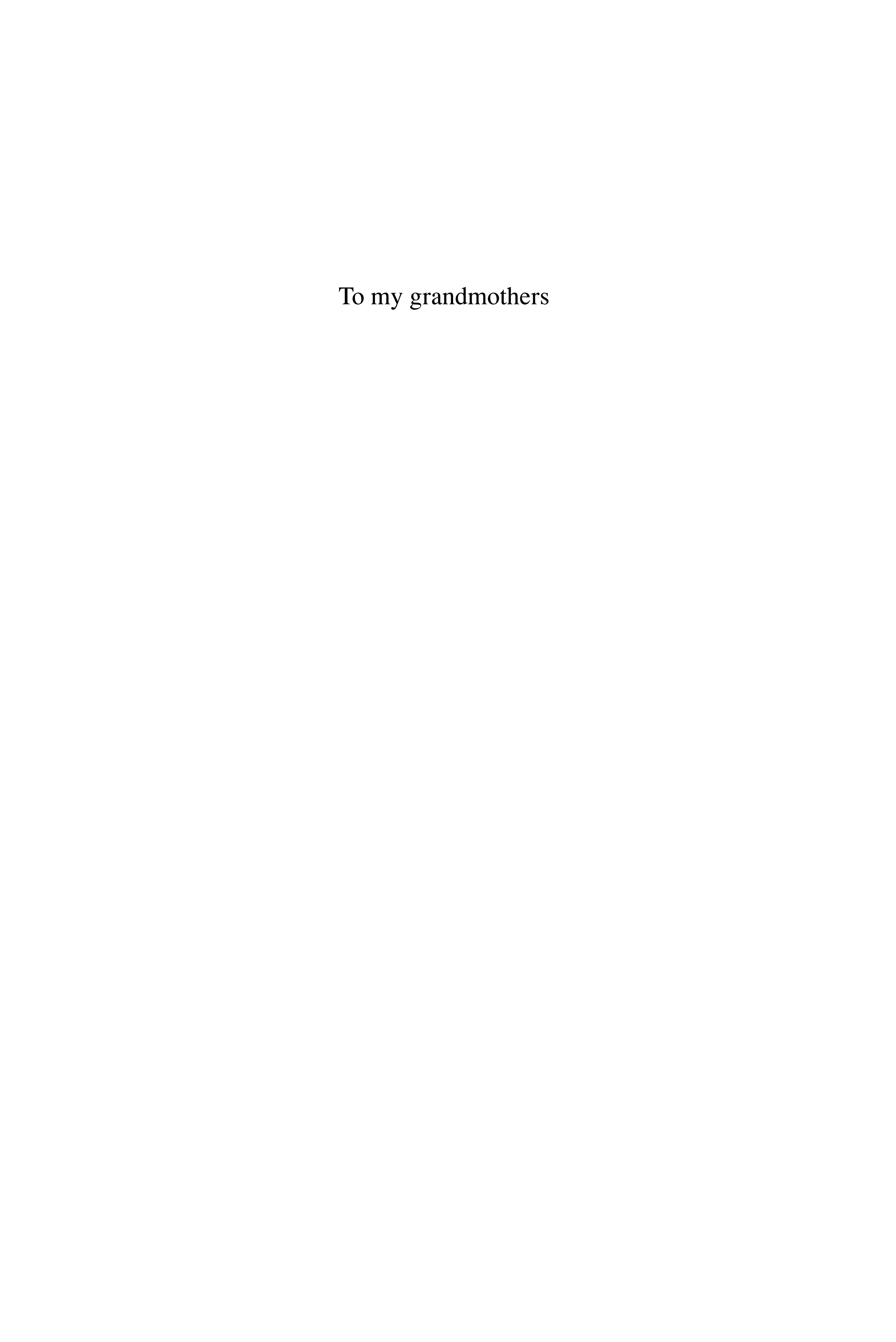
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همه شب در این امیدم که نسیم صبحگاهي
به پیام آشنائي بنوازد آشنا را
(شهریار)

'All night, every night, I live in the hope that the dawn breeze will caress
the friend with the note of familiarity.'
(Shahriyar)



To my grandmothers

Contents

Part two

Shi'i Rituals, Pious Artefacts and Material Culture

Foreword

WE LIVE IN A BROKEN WORLD in which so much human disharmony seems to focus on matters of faith. This conference, on 'The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism', had its origins in the Ashmolean Museum's Inter-faith Exhibition Service (AIFES), which was an attempt to use art to build bridges between the different religious communities in the UK. Under the curatorship of Dr Ruth Barnes, it put on a successful exhibition, *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Journey*, in 2006, but sadly was closed down soon after due to lack of further funding.

One of the important academic points which emerged from that initiative, however, was that exhibitions of inter-religious art could not be mounted without the necessary resources to identify the works of art of the religions concerned, and, within each religion, the art of its sects or denominations. There is, of course, a plentiful supply of books about Islamic art available today, but, surprisingly, there is very little written about the art of Shi'ism. Indeed, from the perspective of its plurality, surprisingly little has been written about art in Islam at all. Although Thomas Arnold in his book *Painting in Islam* published in 1928 includes a chapter on religious art in Islam, his interest focused on the religious people or religious stories which were depicted by Muslim artists, not on what that represented in terms of the different religious streams within Islam. More relevant have been Sarwat Okasha's book, *The Muslim Painter and the Divine*, subtitled 'The Persian Impact on Islamic Religious Painting',[1] and Maria Vittoria Fontana's *Iconografia dell'Ahl al-Bayt*,[2] which is a study of Persian images from the twelfth to the twentieth century. However, both these studies are limited in their scope, and put their emphasis firmly on painting. More recently there has appeared Paddy Baker's book, *The Religious Arts of Islam*,[3] which is the first real attempt to put together a comprehensive and readable work on this general subject, and includes valuable information about Shi'i art.

One dynasty within the Islamic plurality which has received considerable attention is, of course, the Ismaili Fatimid dynasty of Egypt. Here there has been interest in the way architectural forms have been articulated as

Ismaili in intent through the development of shrines,[4] through the use of particular Qur'anic inscriptions[5] and through the use of symbols of different types; e.g. stars, octagons, rayed blind arches and so on.[6] The Fatimids have caught the imagination of art historians too,[7] through their extensive trade networks, their extraordinarily rich treasuries, their fine lustre-ware and their magnificent rock crystals, but there has rarely been any attempt to extract an Ismaili message from such objects – if indeed one exists.[8]

If we turn to the Deccan, the art and architecture of the great sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Shi'i dynasties of that area – the Nizamshahis of Ahmednagar, the Adilshahis of Bijapur and the Qutbshahis of Golconda and Hyderabad – are much less well known among the generality of Islamic art historians than those of the Fatimids or of the dynasties of Shi'i Iran. This is in spite of the efforts of a small group of twentieth-century scholars[9] and men of the calibre of Dr Naqvi,[10] who was a member of the present conference; so too the eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Shi'i nawabs of Avadh, or Lucknow, in northern India.[11]

When it comes to Shi'i Iran (if we define that as Iran from the accession of Shah Ismail I to the present day), its artistic and architectural achievements are world famous. Cities such as Isfahan and Shiraz display their elegant minarets, their sumptuous domes and their tiled facades to bus-loads of tourists; coffee-table books allow Western audiences to enjoy these riches without the need to travel; at leading universities throughout the world, Safavid tile-work, painting and other art forms are studied and enjoyed by succeeding generations of students. Yet it is also clear that much of its art and architecture remains disappointingly understudied. True, there have been extensive studies on Safavid painting, but even here such study has not been comprehensive – the later period, post the death of Shah Abbas I, for example, is still relatively little researched, Eleanor Sims' publications being notable exceptions.[12] Provincial Safavid architecture too remains relatively unknown, though the increasing number of Iranian publications devoted to cataloguing the monuments of individual towns is constantly improving our knowledge.[13] In other fields of art, the only major catalogue of part of Safavid Iran's huge ceramic output is Yolande Crowe's *Persia and China.*[14] For the Qajars we have considerably less, though mention should be made of Layla Diba and Maryam Ekhtiar's *Royal Persian Paintings,* Julian Raby's *Qajar Portraits* and of the Khalili collection volume, *Lacquer of the Islamic Lands*.[15]

By and large, the art and architecture of Shi'i Iran has been discussed within its own limits, and all too little has been written about the relationship of Shi'ism to art or to more general material culture in Iran. Consequently, there are all too many questions one would like to pose. Just as an example,

in what areas of material culture has Iranian Shi'ism manifested itself through objects or buildings that are unique within the overall culture of Islam?

In the political and religious sphere, Shi'ism has, of course, been the official religion of Iran since the beginning of the sixteenth century; numerous academic studies have focused on this phenomenon, on the Moharram rituals, on the *ta'ziyeh* plays, on Shi'i theology and, of course, on the post-revolution politics of Shi'i Iran. I shall not attempt to enumerate these. Yet surprisingly little serious study has been done to bring these politico-religious and cultural spheres together, to trace the way in which Shi'i rule and Shi'i theology have interacted with the architecture, art and material culture of Iran during this period. To what extent, for example, are the art and architecture of Iran from the Safavid period onwards identifiably Shi'i, and what does this say about the relationship of nation, state and faith in Iran? A fascinating commentary on this question is to be found in May Farhat's PhD thesis on the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad,[16] which has sadly never been published and appreciated by the wider scholarly world.

The year 2006 was not the right one to launch a conference on the art of all the Shi'i areas of the Islamic world: there was neither the funding nor the manpower. Instead, Dr Pedram Khosronejad and I decided to take a small-scale approach and to focus first on Shi'i Iran. Our aim within that brief, however, was broad: we wanted to gather together all those international scholars, or as many of them as possible, who had a serious interest in the artistic output of Shi'i Iran. More than that, we decided not to limit the subject by too close a focus on art and architecture. The words 'material culture' provided us with a much broader concept and brought with them the opportunity for a broader spectrum of scholars to participate – historians, anthropologists, ethnologists and folklorists, as well as art and architectural historians. Our aim, therefore, was to provide the opportunity for the sharing of ideas, for interaction between individuals, for the building of contacts and friendships and, above all, the chance to increase understanding of the nature of the art and material culture of Shi'ite Iran.

Naturally, a conference of this type depends on its speakers, and the sessions into which it is organised depend on the topics of their papers. Based on the titles and abstracts of the papers offered, the conference was divided into the following four sections: Shi'ism and Islamic Mortuary Architecture; Shi'ism, Ritual and Material Culture; Shi'ism, Nomadism and Material Culture; and Shi'ism, Symbols and Iconography. It is immediately evident that this conference was, indeed, much broader than those traditionally frequented by art and architectural historians. The result was a

conference that forced the boundaries of art historical scholarship, and led to much more penetrating discussions. It was also exciting to see the range of countries represented by the speakers: Iran, India, Uzbekistan, Lebanon, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, the United States and Great Britain. Such diverse scholarly backgrounds greatly enriched our interaction.

The two-day Oxford conference only began to scratch the surface of the subject, but the expectation was that it would provide a starting point, a base line, from which other scholars would be able to develop new ideas and new theories. And, by encouraging students and scholars to look more closely at Iranian art in terms of its faith communities, we were also hopeful that it would provoke a much wider discussion on the role of sectarian art in Islamic culture generally. All the more important is this publication, which will put the conference papers into the hands of the wider scholarly community, and I am particularly grateful to Dr Pedram Khosronejad, who has undertaken the editing of the publication, having also been the organiser of the very successful conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Middle East Centre of St Antony's College, the Barakat Trust, the British Academy, the Institute of Ismaili Studies, the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Maison Française for their support for the conference.

James W. Allan
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Acknowledgements

ALL BUT FOUR OF THE ELEVEN chapters that make up this collection were first presented at the International conference of the 'Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism', of which I had the honour to be joint convener with Prof. James Allan, held in Maison Française d'Oxford, with the support of The Middle East Centre of St Antony's College of the University of Oxford, in July 2006. In addition to the chapters published in this book, the following academics also made contributions to the conference: Kishvar Rizvi (Yale University, New Haven), 'Sufi and Shii: Religious Identity and Architectural Patronage of Shrines in Safavid Iran'; Yasser Tabba (Oberlin College, Ohio), 'Invented Pieties: The Revival of Shiite Shrines in Contemporary Syria'; Aftandil Erkinov (National University of Uzbekistan, Tashkent), 'Ahmad Yasavi: An Ismaili *Pir* of the Turkistan Region'; Peter Chelkowski (New York University, New York), '*Nakhl* and *Nakhl* Rituals in Central Iran'; Sabrina Mervin (IISMM, Paris), 'The Shiite Theatre in South Lebanon: The Karbala Drama in Sabaya'; Ali Akbari (Institute of Nomadism, Tehran), 'Shiite Material Culture of Nomadic Peoples of Iran'; Inge Demant-Mortensen (Independent Researcher, Copenhagen), 'Shiite Iconography in a Nomadic Funeral Context'; Sadiq Naqvi (Osmania University, Hyderabad), 'The Impact of the Material Culture of Iranian Shiism on Shiite Art in Deccan'; and Firuzeh Abdullaeva (University of Oxford, Oxford), 'Firdousi's Shahnama as a Shiite Book'.

That these studies are not included here is generally the author's own choice, the editor's decision, or because they were scheduled to appear elsewhere. For the importance of their work on the topic, I also invited Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Christiane Gruber, Raya Shani and Thierry Zarcone to join this collection. I am grateful for their contribution.

Also I should thank the contributions of the session chairmen: Sheila Canby, James Allan, Paul Luft, Richard Tapper and Luke Treadwell.

I would like to thank all the participants for an exceptionally good-humoured and productive conference which showed how rich the possibilities

for further progress are in the interdisciplinary studies of the *Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shiism* and other Shi'ite societies.

Although all the chapters, in one way or another, focus on the art and material culture of Shi'ism, as broadly defined, I have grouped them into two more or less coherent sections, the first of which, in particular, has several areas of overlap. Every attempt has been made to impose a reasonable consistency in the presentation of these chapters.

My first thanks should go to James Allan, who was my main supporter and joint convener of this programme, for organising the conference and also for publishing this book. Without the full support of Walter Armbrust, who was at that time director of the Middle East Centre of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford, I could never have run this programme and I want to express my sincere gratitude to him. The conference was supported by generous grants from the Iran Heritage Foundation, the British Academy, the Institute of Ismaili Studies, the Barakat Trust and Centro Incontri Umani (Switzerland).

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publications: *War in Iranian Cinema* (I.B.Tauris); *Women's Rituals and Ceremonies in Islamic Societies* (C.I.U. and I.B.Tauris); and *Unburied Memories: Martyrs' Grave Photographs and Funerary Memorial Objects* (special issue of the *Journal of Visual Anthropology on Iran*). He is also chief editor of the *Journal of Anthropology of the Middle East and Central Eurasia*.

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Notes on Transliteration

WE ALL KNOW THAT TRANSLITERATION IS always a difficult task in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. This book also posed several difficulties because the chapters included different languages. Because this work is intended for a wider audience than a small circle of academics, we adopted a flexible system. In some cases, the authors wished to place special emphasis on their system of transliteration, so we kept the original transliteration that they used in their chapter. Otherwise, we followed one general rule for terms that appear repeatedly throughout the different chapters, such as *Hoseyn*, *Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb*, *Moharram* and *Zolfaqar*. Such terms are transliterated according to modern Persian.

Introduction

ANY DISCUSSION ON SHI'I MATERIAL CULTURE and art objects in Iran today clearly benefits from a familiarity with key anthropological debates and theories on art and material culture more broadly.[1] That there has typically been some hesitation or reticence on the part of Islamic art historians in engaging with such debates and, particularly, in applying anthropological methodologies in their studies of Islamic material culture and artefacts, is further reason to avoid neglecting the properly anthropological dimensions of such fields of study, which can so enrich our material. This I have already defended at length elsewhere.[2] In this introduction it is therefore appropriate to provide a brief overview of some of the main conceptual and methodological questions emerging from the increasingly visible fields of the anthropology of art and material culture studies.

'The history of Western understanding of others' art is a history of Western, not others'... (Shelton 1995)[3]

On art (an anthropological view)

Any analysis of art comes up against the question of what art is. Kristeller demonstrates that the term 'art' is routinely invoked by authors to refer to the ornamented or figurative images created by all people in all times of history and, thus, has become a somewhat universal term.[4] Art is either not defined or very difficult to define. We all know what art is theoretically, but we often have much difficulty in pinning down in a practical sense what it is that we 'know'. Pasztory (2005) argues that it is not possible to separate art from non-art; there are only things of various sorts, functions, forms and meanings.[5] 'The term "art" in English (*Kunst* and other analogues can have different glosses) indicates a conventional category of great diffuseness. It can refer to almost any patterned-application skill; from cooking or public speaking (rhetoric) to a variety of graphic and plastic creations. Historically, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry have been distinguished as "fine arts" '.[6] In contemporary cultural life, art is becoming one of the main sites of cultural production for transforming difference into

discourse, for making it meaningful for action and thought. Particularly because anthropology has also seen this as its role in the production of cultural knowledge, Marcus (1996) argues that critical understanding and a new relationship between art and anthropology are required.[7]

That art was rarely the starting point may be at least partly owing to the fact that anthropological studies of art have so often consisted of little more than the investigation of the role of art objects in maintaining the social structure, so evident in functionalist analyses. In such approaches, Coote and Shelton (1994) believe the 'artness' of the objects seems to be of secondary importance to their political or symbolic role. Why should art objects function as they are supposed to do? How in fact do they do so? and Why and how are they vehicles of meaning? are all questions more often ignored than asked, and more asked than answered.[8] So we can then ask, What is the role for anthropology in this field if for anthropologists, as for sociologists, art is to be viewed essentially as a social product?

As Firth (1994) notes, 'in a discussion of art and anthropology, it is not easy to strike a balance between description and theory: to show the richness of anthropological studies of art without complete immersion in ethnographic detail, and to point out how our analysis of art can be made coherent with an understanding of art more broadly, and of that particular society as a whole.[9] To an anthropologist, the formal qualities of a piece of sculpture or music are significant. But from an anthropological standpoint, even the simplest naming of an object – as mask, or anthropomorphic figure, or funeral song – indicates an awareness of a social ritual and economic matrix in which the object has been produced'.[10]

In his ethnography of art objects in Africa, Azverdo (1973) writes:

> Our position holds that the anthropology of art is not simply the study of those objects that have been classified as art objects by Western art history, or by the international art market. Nor is art an arbitrary category of objects defined by a particular anthropological theory; rather, art making is a particular kind of human activity that involves both the creativity of the producer and the capacity of others to respond to and use art objects, or to use objects as art.[11]

In this regard, Layton (1991) argues that the 'classification of works of art by the Western art world is not a relevant criterion for defining the category of non-Western arts, even if there is an overlap in the works that might be included. The criteria used to include works from non-Western societies under the European rubric of art are of more relevance to the history of Western art than they are to understanding the significance of those objects

in their own cultural contexts'.[12] It must be considered, however, that if the 'objective of anthropology is partly to alter Western ways of thinking about different cultures, and of thinking about our own, then an anthropologically-informed Western category of Aboriginal or African art, for example, (or Yoruba art, San art and so on), is potentially valuable'.[13] Morphy and Perkins (2006) acknowledge that there are good arguments for deconstructing the art category and replacing it with more specific concepts, such as depiction, representation, aesthetics and so on, all of which are relevant to some or all of the objects we include under the rubric of art.[14]

Miller (1997, 1998, 2005) argues that the study of art can also be located within the anthropology of material culture and that there is often a fine dividing line between art and non-art within that category.[15] His response is to recognise that the category of art is indistinct, involving a series of overlapping polythetic sets that contain objects that differ widely in their form and effects. Clearly, we think that the more general concept of art is relevant to understanding the role of such objects in human social life.

In addition, Layton (1991) argues that there are two approaches to the definition of art that are applicable across cultural boundaries, even if neither quite seems to have universal application. One approach deals with aesthetics, and the other treats art as communication distinguished by particularly apt images.[16] To date, anthropology has focused on the function and meaning of art objects, rather than on their essential power as objects. 'Traditionally, it has been aesthetics (the 'theory' of art) that has strived to illuminate the specific objective characteristics of the art object as an object' (Morphy & Perkins 2005: 4).

In this regard, Gell (1998) contends that the 'task of the anthropology of art is not, as Price (2002), Coote and Shelton (1994), Morphy (2002) and others suppose, to define the characteristics of each culture's aesthetic. He acknowledges interesting work by Thomas (1991) and Steiner (1994) on the reception of non-Western art in the West but argues that this is not a genuine anthropology of art because it does not study art functioning in the context for which it was created'.[17]

Layton (2003) believes Gell is surely correct in drawing attention to the need for anthropologists to focus on the object as object.[18] Demonstrating how objects work in the societies in which they are made and circulate must be a central feature of any anthropology of art. 'Unlike aesthetics, however, which deals in universals, the anthropology of art will deal with cultural particularities' (Morphy & Perkins 2005: 4). Thus, it will need to demonstrate not just how objects 'work', but the kind of '*work*' done by objects at all levels of the cosmological and social fields.

Gell also argues that aesthetic properties can be assessed only in terms of the intended effect of an art object in its context of use. The anthropology of art, he believes, should be interested in how aesthetic principles are mobilised in the course of social interaction. For example, Melanesian aesthetics are about efficacy, the capacity to accomplish tasks, not beauty (Layton 2003: 4). Regarding this issue, Banks (1996) says that there are indigenous aesthetic traditions that have nothing whatsoever to do with European culture and history. People reify art objects, they mystify art, they talk about non-verbal qualities that only the true aesthetic can appreciate – in everything from paintings and poetry to natural landscape. Here the concern is simply to acknowledge that there are other systems of aesthetics besides the Western one, whose assumptions need to be unpacked, following the normal procedures of anthropological analysis.[19]

With this issue, Ingold (1996) argues that we are concerned simply with establishing that the concept of aesthetics is a useful one to apply in cross-cultural analysis. Far from commending our aesthetic judgements of other people's artefacts, we hold that the aesthetic of objects should be analysed in the context and under the terms of the society that produces them: it is this use of the concept of aesthetics, to develop understanding of 'other' people's cultures, that gives it cross-cultural applicability.[20]

As anthropologists from Boas to Coote have noted, there is no doubt that the aesthetic dimension applies to the natural world as well as to cultural products.[21] In one sense, we might argue that the concept of art is useful simply as a flag to remind anthropologists not to neglect this dimension of an artefact in their analysis. However, art does not inhere simply in the aesthetic dimension of an object. Art categorises certain kinds of objects and a certain way of acting in the world that shows common elements cross-culturally. The category differentiates art objects from other objects, even if the boundaries of the category are blurred.[22]

Morphy and Perkins (2006) argue that art is an all-encompassing category; it includes objects of many different types that are incorporated in different ways in different contexts. In some cases, the semantic aspects of the artefact may be of central relevance to the way it functions. In other cases, its expressive or aesthetic properties may be central. Whereas in some art systems meanings are encoded in almost language-like ways, in others meaning operates at a more general level. In most cases, the same artworks in context can be approached from a variety of different perspectives, all of which are relevant to understanding some aspect of their form or significance. As O'Hanlon (1995) points out, it is important 'to recognise the multidimensionality of art', where the semantic,

aesthetic, affective and purposive dimensions all apply to the same object or event.[23]

On material culture

The subdiscipline known as 'material culture studies' constitutes a diffuse and relatively young interdisciplinary field of study in which a concept of materiality provides both the starting point and the justification. For a discipline such as anthropology, which is concerned with what it is to be human, Miller (2005) believes that we need to start our discussion of this issue with an acknowledgement that the definition of humanity has often become almost synonymous with the position taken on the question of materiality.[24] Conkey (2006) proposes that one reason for focusing primarily on anthropological approaches to material culture and the object world is that anthropology has had an erratic history, an on-again/off-again, often distancing relationship with artefacts and objects.[25]

Having arisen out of a wide variety of research traditions, material culture studies are inevitably diverse. In addition, the very concept of materiality is itself heterogeneous and ambiguous. Attempts at rigorous definition are entangled with deep metaphorical roots and philosophical connotations. According to various dictionary definitions, materiality can mean 'substance', something comprising elements or constituents of variously composed matter; the tangible, the existing or concrete, the substantial, the worldly and real, as opposed to the imaginary, ideal and value-laden aspects of human existence. The concept of materiality is thus typically used to refer to the fleshy, corporal and physical, as opposed to the spiritual, ideal and value-laden aspects of human existence.[26]

Unlike historians who generally use visual or artefactual materials only to illustrate themes or topics drawn from written sources, material culture specialists derive meaning from objects themselves, by paying attention to the form, distribution and changing character of the objects and their environments. They want to know how people use artefacts and experience spaces. What separates students of material culture from antiquarians is the insistence that objects are not merely interesting forms to be described and collected. The material world of landscape, tools, buildings, household goods, clothing and art is not neutral and passive – people interact with the material world, thus permitting it to communicate specific messages, and the material world in turn shapes their habitus and self-understanding.[27]

Tilley (2006) believes that materiality can also be taken to refer to individual things, or collections of things, rather than to persons or societies. Things are typically referred to in terms of material possessions and physical and economic wellbeing. Things thus have material benefits for persons.

The object and the objectivity of things supposedly stand opposed to the subject and the subjectivity of persons. From this perspective, persons are animated and alive, whereas things, whatever they may be, are simply static and dead.[28]

Generally speaking, material culture studies involve the analysis of a domain of things that are endlessly diverse; anything from a packet of fast food to a house to an entire landscape, either in the past or in the present, and from within contemporary urban and industrial cultures in Europe to small-scale societies in Africa, the Middle East or Central Asia. Contemporary material culture studies may make their principal concern, and starting point for analysis, the particular properties of objects or things: things as matter, as found or made, static or mobile, rare or ubiquitous, local or exotic, new or old, special or monumental, traditional or modern, simple or complex.[29]

We should not forget that our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meaning apart from that which human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them. In this regard, Appadurai (1988) argues that a

> fundamental anthropological problem we are left with is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that, we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, uses and trajectories. Only through analysis of these trajectories can we interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.[30]

Moreover, material culture studies may take the human subject or social relations as their starting point: the manner in which people think through themselves, and their lives and identities, through the medium of different kinds of things. Material culture studies in various ways inevitably have to emphasise the dialectical and recursive relationship between persons and things. Clearly things make people, and people who are made by those things go on to make other things. The central question, however, is not whether this does or does not happen, but in what kind of way it happens.[31] Subjects and objects are indelibly linked. Through considering one, we find the other. Material culture, as the book suggests, is part and parcel of human culture in general; and just as the concept of culture has hundreds

of potential definitions and manifestations and is never just one entity or thing, so is the material component of culture.[32]

Tilley (2006) argues that this field of study centres on the idea that materiality is an integral dimension of culture, and that there are dimensions of social existence that cannot be fully understood without it. Yet the 'material' and 'culture' are commonly regarded as fundamentally opposed, as, for instance, the physical is to the intellectual.[33] 'Culture', as our collection attempts to demonstrate, is always a process and is never reducible to either its objects or its subjective forms. For this reason, our analyses should always be concerned with the properties of this dynamic relationship, never those of mere things.

Miller (1998) also indicates that if we focus on the materiality of things directly, then we must immediately confront the different forms of 'objects' that they represent.[34] The major shortcoming of many theories of the concept of culture is that they identify culture with a set of objects, such as the arts in themselves, rather than see it as an evaluation of the relationship through which objects are constituted as social forms.[35] Miller's (1997) idea is that, in practice, the object is usually a historical phenomenon, which strikes us as evidence for a larger, anterior cultural tradition within which we exist, and is inseparable from the linguistic mechanisms that are central to our knowledge of it. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the specific nature of the object, and, in particular, its physical presence, will result in a tendency for it to act in certain distinctive ways, compared with other media of cultural expression.[36]

In his book *Culture and Consumption*, McCracken (1990) proposes that objects contribute to the construction of a culturally-constituted world because they are a vital visible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible.[37] Miller (1997) adds that societies have an extraordinary capacity either to consider objects as having attributes that may not appear as evident to outsiders, or else to ignore altogether attributes that would have appeared to those same outsiders as being inextricably part of that object.[38]

'The object tends toward presentational form, which cannot be broken up as though into grammatical subunits, and as such it appears to have a particularly close relation to emotions, feelings and basic orientations of the world' (Miller 1997). 'Furthermore, an object cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence but should be understood as belonging in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning. As such, objects are enmeshed and active in social relations, not merely passive entities in these processes'.[39]

'Objects are therefore not just settings for human actions and meanings, but integral to them. Indeed, Gell argues that objects themselves can be seen as social actors, in that it is not the meanings per se that are important but their social effects, as they construct and influence the field of social action in ways that would not have occurred if they did not exist.'[40] 'By studying culture as something created and lived through objects, we can better understand social structures and larger systemic dimensions, such as inequality and social differences, as well as human action, emotion and meaning' (Woodward 2007: 4).

Our collection

Religious meanings are not merely inherited or simply accessed through the intellect. Orthodox statements of belief and formal rituals, as McDannell (1998) proposes, form only one part of the complicated structure of religion. Religious meanings must be constructed and reconstructed over and over again. Amid the external practice of religion – which utilises artefacts, art, architecture and landscapes – comes the inner experience of religion. We can no longer accept that the *appearance* of religion is inconsequential to the *experience* of religion. McDannell argues that the sensual elements of a religion are not merely decorations that mask serious belief; it is through the visible world that the invisible world becomes known and felt.[41] Religion, as he proposes, is more than a type of knowledge acquired through reading holy books and listening to holy men. People build religion into the landscape, they make and buy pious images for their homes, and they wear special reminders of their faith next to their bodies.[42] In addition, people learn the discourses and habits of their religious community through the material dimensions of their religions, including (art) objects.

When we look carefully at the interaction between people and religious artefacts, architecture and environment, we see that the practice of one religion is a subtle mixture of traditional beliefs and personal improvisations (McGuire 2005). Religions, as Orsi (2005) points out, are often inconsistent, even contradictory, and always include forbidden and outlawed beliefs and practices as well as those that are sanctioned.[43] The relation of art to religion is a complex issue. Universally, art objects have seemed to serve religion functionally and, conversely, to have drawn upon it for themes. In this view, religious art and material culture reinforce conceptual patterning of a mystical order through other media.

It is worth asking, what does a study of religion look like that takes material culture for its starting point, and not texts? Based on the chapters in this book, we think it will be a useful exercise to attempt the study of a living tradition, for which we have an adequate textual and ethnographic record,

by using material culture as a starting point. As Cort (1996) points out, if we look first at the objects, and base our attempts at understanding on them, will we emerge from our study with a different view of the tradition?[44]

In most of the following chapters, this is an essential question. The chapters in this volume provide an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of the material culture of religion (Shi'ism), reflecting the richness and variety that characterise Iranian religiosity and its materiality today, as well as those of other Shi'i communities elsewhere. While the chapters mostly concentrate on different themes of Shi'i devotional art and material culture, together they cover a wide theoretical and cultural range. The studies are simultaneously concerned with the Shi'i religious and social practices in which material culture is embedded, and, as Leite (2004) proposes, in a quite new direction, with the dynamics of recontextualisation, valuation and reinterpretation that devotional objects undergo through different cultural and historical contexts.[45]

In one word, this book is about pious *artefacts* – things that Shi'ism somehow had direct influence over in their creation, function and circulation. In this regard, one may call these *things* the art and material culture of Shi'ism. In this collection, contributors work on *artefacts* with different angles:

- *Artefacts* as created by persons: religious and art objects; book illustrations; religious iconographies and votive posters; sacred calligraphies; talismans and magic amulets; tombstones.
- The relationship of *artefacts* to religious beliefs; ceremonies and emotions; value systems; and, more broadly, social identities.
- The relationship of *artefacts* to history and tradition; individual and collective memory; and sociopolitical change.

Amir-Moezzi discusses the role of material culture – popular religious art objects – in Sufi practices, Khosronejad reflects on the material culture of death and dying among tribal societies, Suleman focuses on the meaning and function of iconography in art objects, Gleave observes the interplay between pious object and religious text, and Vesel analyses different aspects of talismans as magic objects. Additionally, Gruber analyses the image as a mode of symbolic communication, Marzolph reflects on book illustrations as visual representations of religious themes, Zarcone and Shani present iconography and calligraphy as two modes of religious symbolism, Flaskerud discusses votive images as ritual objects, and Frembgen focuses on religious posters as devotional iconography.

What meanings do these religious material culture and pious art objects hold for Shi'i believers? Why do they (Shi'a) feel compelled not only to uphold the tenets of their faith, but to use artefacts that reflect and secure their beliefs?

Miller (1998) argues that 'objects may not merely be used to refer to a given social group, but may themselves be constitutive of a certain social relation', calling this phenomenon 'the cultural nature of the subject-object relationship'.[46] Graburn's findings (1976) and Miller's argument (1997) suggest that art objects cannot simply be regarded as reflections of fixed identities.[47]

Shi'i communities, like any other religious society, learn the discourses and habits of their religious community through the artefacts and material culture of their religion. 'Religious material culture does not simply reflect an existing reality. Experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps bring about religious values, norms, behaviours and attitudes. Practising religion sets into motion ways of thinking. It is the continual interaction with objects, images and symbols that makes one religious in a particular manner' (McDanell 1998). McDannell (1998) proposes that the symbolic systems of a particular religious language are not merely handed down; they must be learned, through doing, seeing and touching.[48]

Shi'i believers use devotional and pious things and objects in a variety of ways. Meanings may be directed and articulated by a controlling institutional body with a long history of customs and traditions. Such meanings do not, however, always help us to understand the personal meanings that people find in their daily use of religious material culture.[49] Furthermore, individual meanings do not merely mirror the 'intentions of a clerical elite, nor do they express the idiosyncratic whims of the masses' (McDanell 1998).

In his chapter, Amir-Moezzi discusses how 'the pocket pious image', a devotional object, could carry sanction and protection to its proprietor. The 'pocket *shamā'il*', according to Amir-Moezzi, creates a strong linkage between religious pictorial art and the mystical brotherhood. Pious images and devotional objects help people contemplate the divine and teach the true faith because not everyone can approach God through the intellect. When one concentrates on a religious image, the soul could eventually be inflamed with love for the divine. Through contemplating the signs of God (or saints), the mind and spirit of the believer ascend from the visible to the invisible; from the sign to the referent. Devotional pictures and objects, as McDannell (1998) argues, bridge the gap between the human and divine and evoke emotion in the viewer. From the emotion comes the desire to live a better life, pray more devotedly, or feel healing comfort.[50]

The importance of the visual – as material culture – in the study of religion has been highlighted in several studies.[51] The chapters in our book proceed along similar lines by focusing on visual art as a unique category of material object, a category characterised by the special ability to mediate imaginary, linguistic, intellectual and material domains. They argue in a number of contexts that this ability gives the image (e.g. illustrations, iconographies) a particular power in the dialectical movement from externalisation to objectivation to internalisation.

Gruber's chapter is of particular importance for this collection and its readers. She reflects on how the Safavids, in order to secure their religiopolitical legitimacy, patronised paintings and manuscript illustrations with religious themes. She argues that these visual materials served as bridges between the earliest Shi'i illustrated manuscripts and later Safavid exegetes; therefore, they must be seen as cultural products that are historically contingent and laden with very particular symbolic overtones.

By approaching these visual materials, Gruber argues that we should also heed historical evidence and data as a means of understanding Shi'i artefacts as cultural products. Rather than restrict imagery to the rarefied state of aesthetic contemplation, or submit it to theological critique or application, Morgan (1999) argues that we need to 'examine imagery in terms of the social worlds of those who make, merchandise, purchase, and use it'.[52]

In his chapter, Marzolph presents and analyses different types of religious illustrations in lithographed books of Qajar periods in Iran. He reflects on the ability of such lithographed books and their images to contribute to the popularisation of quintessential religious concepts while drawing on popular imagery and furthering the stereotypical representation of themes lying at the core of Shi'i self-definition. In these chapters we will also see how the material culture of religion is widely understood to sacralize space, to delineate in spatial parameters the site or point at which the holy is manifested and made to communicate to believers the crucial signifiers of their identity as believers. The sacred is therefore experienced as invested in a place – a saint's shrine or a devotional object and image, for example – as concrete expression of a community's relationship to the divine.[53]

In her chapter, Flaskerud presents how in Shiraz votive images – pseudo-portraits of holy personages, narrative images, representations of holy places and portraits of living and deceased members of the local community in contemporary Shi'i devotional practices and ritual performance – are employed and why these are regarded as effective and adequate vehicles for invoking favour and giving thanks.

According to Freedberg (1991), votive images are realistic because we see a sound replica of the body, or part of it; we respond to it as though it was real, and its soundness (or sometimes its sheer preciousness) reassures us of the fact of healing and deliverance to safety.[54] The *ex votos* were placed in religious places after miraculous healing and are material reminders of the possibility of the sacred breaking into the world of nature.[55]

These Shi'i posters and many like them have served as powerful symbols in Shi'i piety because believers have learned from childhood to regard them as illustrations, as untrammelled visualisations of what they profess. Understanding why this is so and how it occurs requires that we see popular religious imagery as part of a visual piety, by which Morgan (1999) means the visual formation and practice of religious belief. In so doing, we must attend not only to those religions that actively employ imagery, but also to the largely unwritten cultural history and aesthetics of religious popular art. Only then can we begin to understand how images articulate the social structure of a believer's world.[56]

Accordingly, Frembgen's study explores how Shi'i religious performances in Pakistan and India open a ritual space for a collective liminal experience: 'They are focused on the commemoration, recall and re-enactment of Shi'i *Heilsgeschichte* and spirituality, where material manifestations of religion play a key role in an intense communication with the divine.'

The centre of Frembgen's ethnographical approach is one of the many zoomorphic symbols of Shi'ism, *Zoljanah*, the white stallion of Imam Hoseyn in the battle of Karbala. Frembgen's chapter draws our attention to the plurality of visual practices, distinguished from each other by the history of Shi'ism, cultural politics and the ritual uses of devotional images, all of which are, in turn, keyed to the image's style and iconography and the historical circumstances of its production and reception.

In addition, Zarcone and Shani observe in their chapters the image of the lion, another Shi'i zoomorphic symbol, as a representation of Imam Ali. While Zarcone follows the iconography and symbol of the lion in poetry and sacred texts (calligraphic lions) attached to the rituals of Bektashi and Alevi Sufi orders in Turkey, Shani deals only with calligraphic lions, whose bodies are shaped by sacred formulas related to Imam Ali with a hidden message.

These two scholars argue that these religious images and sacred calligraphies, founded by Shi'i Sufi ideologies, show us a world but not the world itself. These pictorial calligraphies are not the things shown but representations thereof: representations. 'Representation is a complex

term. It implies that images and texts do not reflect their sources but refashion them according to pictorial or textual codes, so that they are quite separate from, and other than, those sources' (Chaplin 1994: 1). Further than this, Chaplin (1994) proposes that representation can be understood as articulating and contributing to social processes. These social processes determine the representation but are also consequently influenced and altered by it. Thus, 'representations articulate not only visual or verbal codes and conventions, but also the social practices and forces that underline them and with which we interpret the world. Finally, a recipient is implied: someone to whom the representation and its realisation are addressed.'[57]

'Indeed, what images represent may otherwise not exist in reality and may instead be confined to the realm of imagination, wish, desire, dream, or fantasy. And yet, of course, any image exists literally as an object within the world to which it is, one way or another, engaged. That is, images are not mined like ore – they are constructed for the purpose of performing some function within a given sociocultural matrix.'[58] Leppert (1996) believes we should not forget the fact that in most cultures, seeing requires certain skills that are, in part, historically and culturally specific. Thus, every image embodies a way of seeing. Or better still, each image embodies historically, socially and culturally specific competing, and contradictory, ways of seeing.[59]

The lion as a zoomorphic symbol continues its presence in Khosronejad's chapter, where he illustrates historical and religious meanings and social functions of this symbol in oral tradition, funeral ceremonies and the material culture of death and dying among Bakhtiari nomads in southwest Iran. Khosronejad argues: 'Continued analysis of the contemporary oral and funerary traditions in Bakhtiari society will create a rich structure of detailed ethnographic and anthropological evidence for anthropologists interested in nomadic life in Iran.'

In Suleman's essay, by investigating the iconography of the lion through different art objects and material manifestations of Shi'ism in different periods, she demonstrates the relationship among this zoomorphic symbol, Imam Ali and Shi'i devotional beliefs. Her comparative studies can show us the way in which this symbol was created, functioned and circulated in the Islamic world.

In her study on Christian iconography, Kenna (1985) proposes that the icon is a microcosm of the relationship among the material world, human beings and the divine power. More than this, it is a sacramental form of communication with that divine power. In other words, an icon is not just a

picture, not simply a copy or a reminder of an original; by representing that original in a particular way, it maintains a connection with it, as a translation does with the original text.[60]

In different cultures, while some objects have only utilitarian functions, others seemingly possess power and energy. We are not saying that power resides naturally in certain things and not in others. What we should explore is how people activate or enliven objects so that an object's influence can be felt. The nature and extent of affecting presence or power may differ, but even commercialised objects that are no longer used in a religious context still have religious associations because their iconography originated within particular religious communities. By exploring the diverse ways that objects participate in and express changing notions of power, we can chart the various meanings of religious objects.

Vezel's essay explores one of the most interesting material objects of religion: talismans. While the purpose of her observation is limited to the description of figurative representations – humans, animals, plants – with talismans, she tries to show why, where and how some of these objects show Shi'i or Iranian characters. She argues:

> Iranian popular talismans that do not have an obvious Shi'i character are founded on the common learned basis of occult sciences and also benefit from a long Iranian tradition of the illustrated book. Nevertheless, some of these materials display truly Shi'i aspects ... [that are] religious-commemorative objects with protective and talismanic power.

Gleave's chapter focuses on the examination of formal descriptions of belief systems found in religious texts to draw conclusions relating to the artefacts. His chapter flows in a direction contrary to the assumptions of material culture studies; rather than analysing an object to inform the understanding of belief systems, he examines the formal description of a belief system through religious texts and attempts to draw conclusions relating to the object without its (the object's) direct examination. His attention is focused precisely on religio-legal regulations related to the paraphernalia of devotion. His essay examines the variety of surfaces upon which normative prayer might be performed, the substance upon which prostration takes place and stone praying.

Knowledge of the historical text and literary sources is not available to all scholars. Gleave's chapter shows us how important an examination of religious textual traditions is to assess how people in different societies use different sociocultural media, objects and symbols to express concretely,

and integrate into their culture, the specific religious prescriptions and beliefs that are being investigated.

The intention of our collection is to emphasise that the study of the material dimension is as fundamental to understanding culture as a focus on language; social relations; time; space; representations; or relations of production, exchange and consumption. Material culture studies, as our essays propose, may be held simultaneously to intersect with, and transcend, the special concerns of these and other disciplines. Such an intellectual field of study is inevitably eclectic: relatively unbounded and unconstrained, fluid, dispersed and anarchic rather than constricted. In short, it is un-'disciplined'. In our collection, we regard this as a strength rather than a weakness, and an alternative to the inevitable disciplinary restrictions with regard to research that is validated or, otherwise, valuable, serious or appropriate.[61]

Material culture, as our chapters suggest, in itself has no intrinsic meaning of its own. Our Shi'i objects and artefacts are understood and gain significance when their 'human' (Shi'i believers) elements can be deciphered. Shi'i objects and things become meaningful within patterns of relationships. It is only through an examination of the historical and present context of material culture that it can be 'read'.[62]

We also try to show that different people will use Shi'i artefacts or experience environment in different ways: meaning is culturally contingent. There will sometimes be conflicts of meaning and function. People enliven material culture and art objects through use, but we as scholars are not always privileged to observe that intention. There are times when we are left alone with the silent object and no documentation. At that point, it is even more imperative to place material culture in the society that produced it.

The possibility of material culture studies lies not in method but, rather, in an acknowledgement of the nature of culture, as understood by theorists such as Simmel (1968).[63] We as academics can strive for understanding and empathy through the study of what people do with objects, because that is the way people create a world of practice. As Simmel argues, human values do not exist other than through their objectification in cultural forms.[64]

In short, I do not think it is easy to say what these Shi'i *artefacts* mean. A good reading of these devotional objects of popular culture requires an eye for objects and a taste for theory. The study of material culture, McKeown (1997) argues, is especially challenging when the materials in question are religious *things*. In such a case, interpreters must address the complex category of 'religion' and acquaint themselves with a variety of particular and highly defined traditions of doctrine and practice. A richer

and more varied understanding of religious practice will unfold in the study of the material culture of religions.[65]

By bringing together a wide range of approaches to the material culture of Shi'ism, our volume seeks to sharpen scholarly awareness of the nature of materiality and its implications for Shi'i cultural, social and historical knowledge. This collection is far from providing complete answers to all the questions that one can raise in this field, and far, for that matter, from offering a complete view of what are complex and heterogeneous fields of Shi'i devotional art and material culture in Iran. However, we hope that the following collection will not only serve to illuminate some of the general aspects of this field of reach for both specialist and lay reader, but also pave the way for further scholarship in these areas.

Notes

1. For more information on the religious art and material culture of Iran, see Azkayi 1976; Beckett 1957; Brooks 1981, 2002; Boloukbashi 1977, 1999, 2002, 2004; Feilberg 1952, pp. 133–157; Ghasemkhan 2007; Maleki 1996; Mahmoudinejad 1994; Mortensen 1983, 1991, 1996; Mortensen & Nicolaisen 1993, pp. 121–147; Pourkarim 1963a, 1963b, 1966, 1969, 1975; Seyf 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008.
2. Khosronejad 2006, p. 23.
3. In MacClancy 1997, p. 18.
4. In Pasztory 2005, p. 7.
5. Pasztory 2005, p. 11.
6. Firth 1994, p. 15.
7. Marcus 1996, p. 34.
8. Coote and Shelton 1994, p. 3.
9. Firth 1994, p. 15.
10. Firth 1994, p. 15.
11. For more information on this issue, see Azverdo 1973.
12. Morphy & Perkins 2005, p. 13.
13. Morphy & Perkins 2006, p. 14.
14. Morphy & Perkins 2006, p. 12.
15. For more information on this issue, see Miller 1997, 1998, 2005.
16. Layton 1991, p. 4.
17. Layton 2003, p. 450.
18. Layton 2003, p. 449.
19. Banks 1996, p. 287.
20. Ingold 1996, p. 246.
21. Boas 1995, p. 349; Firth 1992, pp. 17–18; Maquet 1988.
22. Morphy & Perkins 2006, p. 15.
23. O'Hanlon 1995.

24. Miller 2005, p. 2.
25. Conkey 2006.
26. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 5.
27. McDannell 1998, p. 2.
28. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 3.
29. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 4.
30. Appadurai 1988, p. 5.
31. Pinney 2006, p. 131.
32. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 4.
33. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 1.
34. Miller 1998, p. 7.
35. Miller 1997, p. 11.
36. Miller 1997, p. 107.
37. McCracken 1990, p. 74.
38. Miller 1997, p. 109.
39. Appadurai 1988; Edwards 2004; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Miller 1997, 1998.
40. Edwards and Hart 2004, p. 4.
41. McDannell 1998, p. 272.
42. McDannell 1998, p. 1.
43. Orsi 2005.
44. Cort 1996, p. 615.
45. Leite 2004, p. 23.
46. Miller 1998, pp. 121–122.
47. Svasek 1997, p. 27.
48. McDannell 1998, p. 2.
49. McDannell 1998, p. 17.
50. McDannell 1998, p. 25.
51. King 2009; Morgan 2005, 2009; Morgan et al. 2010; Plate 2002.
52. Morgan 1999, p. 4.
53. Morgan 1999, p. 182.
54. Freedberg 1991, p. 157.
55. McDannell 1998, p. 152.
56. Morgan 1999, pp. 1–2.
57. Chaplin 1994, p. 1.
58. Leppert 1996, p. 3.
59. Edwards & Hart 2004, p. 4.
60. Kenna 1985, p. 348.
61. Tilley et al. 2006, p. 1.
62. McDannell 1998, p. 3.
63. Simmel 1968.
64. Miller 1998, p. 19.
65. McKeown 1997, p. 650.

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PART ONE

SHI'I DEVOTIONAL ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM

Icon and Meditation: Between Popular Art and Sufism in Imami Shi'ism

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

To Heinz Halm

Introduction

AS IS THE CASE IN ALL religious cultures, Shi'ism possesses a tradition of rich popular art. In the investigation that follows, I try to show that in addition to its richness, this art can be remarkably complex, affecting areas of study that one often considers as pertaining exclusively to learned members of the faith.

In the very composite panoply that is Shi'i pictorial art, the portable icon (*shamā'il jībī*, literally 'the pocket pious image') seems to carry out a special role. It bears the same name of *shamā'il* as the big mural portraits of saints, such as are found in paintings known as 'coffee house' paintings or painted fabrics (literally 'screen' or 'veil', *pardeh*) belonging to the travelling narrators of epic and religious stories (*naqqāl*, *pardehdār*).[1] The most ancient known specimens of the portable *shamā'il* seem to be dated from the eighteenth century. The object originates from Iran or India, where one finds them more easily than elsewhere (see infra), but other Shi'i regions can also produce them.[2]

The portable *shamā'il* is a devotional object expected to bring benediction and protection to its owner. It is a rectangular panel made entirely of wood, or covered in painted papier mâché, measuring about 15–20 cm x 10 cm. The object also exists in the form of an altarpiece made up of two or more panels, occasionally hiding a mirror. It always bears the painted polychrome image (*shamā'il*) presumed to be of holy figures in Shi'ism, almost always that of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, First Imam and archetypal saint in Shi'i lands.[3] Indeed, all the panels that I have seen until today bore the image of ʿAlī, either alone or accompanied by one or more

other characters, especially the Prophet Mohammad; his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; his wife, Fāṭima, who always wears a veil over her face; his servant, Qanbar; or just a lion (an expression of his legendary courage illustrated by his sobriquets *Asadollāh,* lion of God, or *Ḥaydar*, lion). The faces of the masculine characters are often unveiled and clearly painted, or occasionally veiled, that is to say, with the faces not outlined.[4] Very often, ʿAlī is sitting down, his head encircled by a halo, with him carrying his famous sword, Dhū l-faqār, on his knees.[5]

Figure 1, where we see ʿAlī and his two sons, and Plate 1 are very typical of these *shamā'il.* On the first panel, the image is surrounded by mystical poems. On top: *ey shīr e khodā…* ('O lion of God …' – i.e. ʿAlī; the rest is faded). At the bottom: *dar hā ye omīd bar rokham baste shodeh* ('The doors of hope have closed before me'). To the right: *ey ṣāḥeb e Dhū l-faqār e* (instead of *o/va*) *qanbar fatḥī* ('O Master of Dhū l-faqār of – instead of "and of" – Qanbar, [grant me] an opening/inspiration'). To the left: (the beginning is faded)*…goshā ye dar e Khaybar fatḥī* ('O you who opened the door of Khaybar – famous battle of ʿAlī – [grant me] an opening/inspiration'). Here, in fact, we are dealing with a quatrain attributed to the famous khurāsānian mystic, Abū Sa'īd Abū l-Khayr (d. 440 AH/1048 AD):

> O lion of God, Prince Lion (ʿAlī's sobriquet) [grant me] an opening/inspiration,
> O you who conquered the fortress of Khaybar by opening its door,
> The doors of hope have closed before me,
> O Master of Dhū l-faqār and of Qanbar, [grant me] an opening/inspiration.[6]
>
> *Ey shīr e khodā amīr e ḥaydar fatḥī*
> *Vey qal'e goshā ye dar e Khaybar fatḥī*
> *Dar hā ye omīd bar rokham baste shodeh*
> *Ey ṣāḥeb e Dho l-faqār o Qanbar fatḥī*

The reading of the poem begins, therefore, at the top of the panel and continues in an anticlockwise direction. Finally, let us note that the halo surrounding the saints' heads on the first panel is circular, whereas it is in the shape of a flame on the second panel.[7]

To my knowledge, this popular devotional object is unexplored in critical studies. Reference works such as *Shi'ism and Late Iranian Arts* by Samuel R. Peterson, *Iconografia dell'Ahl al-bayt. Immagini di arte persiana dal XII al XX secolo* by Maria Vittoria Fontana, *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch, 1785–1925* edited by Leyla S. Diba and Maryam Ekhtiyar,

Figure 1 Watercolour on paper (13.5 × 6.5 cm.) Inv. no. 2003, 197, 5.
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or *Imageries populaires en Islam* by Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, or even monographs like those of Peter Chelkowski or ʿAlī Bolūkbāshī, ignore it completely.[8] The present study, without at all claiming to fill in this gap, aims to examine certain possible functions of the object in question.

During the summer of 1983, in Shiraz, a dervish belonging to the Sufi brotherhood of the Dhahabiyya showed me one of the panels, calling it a 'pocket *shamā'il*'. It was the first time I had seen one. He told me it was a part of the group of spiritual objects that must be possessed by certain followers – this group of objects is generally called the dervishes' *waṣla* – and it was used as an aid to a secret contemplative practice in the brotherhood called the *vejhe* (from *wijha* in Arabic, see below) exercise. The exercise involves focusing one's eye on the image of ʿAlī while concentrating on one's own heart and practising the *dhikr e ʿAlī*, that is, tirelessly repeating the name of the first imam, which is also one of the names of God. The goal is to achieve contemplation of the 'interior imam', that of the heart of the enlightened individual, in the form of light (*imām-e nūrānī,* literally 'Imam of Light', or *nūrāniyyat-e imām,* 'the luminous radiance of the imam'). Lastly, the mystic added that this practice is mainly that of novice dervishes, those to whom it is forbidden to concentrate on the mental image of the order's existing master's face, because they risk lapsing into 'idolatry' and the 'cult of the master', and also because without physical aid they are incapable of visualising 'the face of Light' of the imam. Therefore, they give them these portraits of ʿAlī, the archetypal imam, so that they use them for a certain amount of time as a visualisation aid until they become apt at paying no heed to 'idolatry of the master'.[9]

The Shirazi dervish's revelations about the *shamā'il* aroused a great interest in me. Indeed, what had struck me at first sight was the posture of ʿAlī holding his sword: kneeling down, forearms crossed so that each hand rests on the opposite thigh; this is one of the typical positions of the Sufi *dhikr* practice. However, despite my numerous studies, I have not been able to find any written corroboration, or even another oral attestation, of this initiatory usage of the portable *shamā'il.* Even other members of the same Dhahabiyya brotherhood whom I know did not want to tell me anything about their *vejhe* practice and the possible aids for it. Several years after this meeting, during my university research in Paris, my investigations showed me that the *vejhe* exercise finds its very ancient roots in the spiritual practice of 'vision by the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi l-qalb*), a practice whose theological, anthropological and eschatological content were allusively exhibited by compilers of Shi'i hadiths as ancient as al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Muḥammad b.

Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī or Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, throughout the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. This encouraged me to pursue my studies beyond the old corpus of research and to study the continuation of the 'vision by the heart' in Shi'i mysticism; more precisely, in the literature of Sufi imami brotherhoods in the modern and contemporary eras. The results of these studies are now published in several works, and their reading seems to me strongly advisable for an adequate comprehension of what follows.[10]

Although this research has made me unearth, amongst other things, the numerous passages of Dhahabi works that I have been able to consult on the practice of 'vision by the heart', I have found no explicit mention of the *vejhe* exercise, nor of the portable *shamā'il* as a contemplation aid, although two factors dating from the 2000s made a connection between my studies on the doctrinal texts and the already old revelations of the dervish from Shiraz. It is, in any case, because of these two factors that I accepted the kind invitation to contribute to this work dedicated to popular Shi'i art, an area a priori distant from my normal fields of investigation.

The first of these factors is that, thanks to the kindness of some old Dhahabi acquaintances, I was able to have an internal document of this brotherhood at my disposal, aptly entitled 'What is *vejhe*?' The copy of this document that was offered to me covers pages 150–160 of a document that seems to be a Dhahabi practice and beliefs manual, apparently written by the present master (2010) of the Dhahabiyya Aḥmadiyya, Dr. Ganjaviyān, or even under his dictation.

The second factor was a group of 14 portable *shamā'il* acquired in a market in Tehran by our colleague and erudite Iran specialist from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Dr. Živa Vesel, who kindly authorised me to study the parts of this collection.[11] We already know two of the *shamā'il* of this group (Figure 1 and Plate 1). However, another part of this collection seems to me to possess factors that are particularly significant to our conundrum, strongly corroborating the statements of the Iranian dervish.

By way of introduction to a more detailed examination of these two factors, let us very quickly resume the content of the previously reported studies on the Shi'i meditational practice of 'vision by the heart' and the role of ʿAlī as a meditational subject.[12]

The pair *ẓāhir/bāṭin* (manifest/secret or exoteric/esoteric), omnipresent in Shi'ism, is naturally tackled in theology as well.[13] God entails two ontological levels: that of the Essence (*dhāt*), which corresponds to the secret, non-manifest level, his unknowable Face, and that of the Names and Attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*), corresponding to God's revealed Face.

The latter is expressed through his archetypal place of theophany (*maẓhar, majlā*), that is the imam in the cosmic and metaphysical way.[14] As far as the question of the vision is concerned, the unfathomable Essence of God can absolutely not be the object of the vision; on the other hand, the Names of God, revealed through the imam, can be seen, not by the physical eye, but, thanks to the discovery of the light of the imam, 'in' or 'by' the heart (these are the two meanings of the particle *bi* in the expression *al-ru'ya bi l-qalb*).[15] In this innermost spiritual practice, which makes of the follower who is enlightened to this practice 'the believer of whom the heart has been tested by God for the faith' (*al-mu'min qad imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li l-īmān*), the vision of the luminous face of the imam in the heart is equivalent to the meditation of God's revealed Face. However, everywhere in esoteric Shi'i literature ʿAlī is presented as the archetypal medium of the cosmic imam, the highest place of God's expression.[16] With such a theosophic imamology, it is therefore natural that ʿAlī plays the central role in contemplative practices. In this respect, it is sufficient for us to quote two hadiths that do not cease to mention mystic works when they address the question of the vision of God through the vision of the imam. First of all, this tradition, which is attributed to the Prophet, is reported by groups of hadiths that are an authority on the matter: 'Looking at the face of ʿAlī is a religious act of adoration; remembering him is a religious act of adoration' (*al-naẓar ilā wajh ʿAlī 'ibāda wa dhikruhu 'ibāda*[17]); next, the hadith is attributed to the first imam himself and one finds it again only in the Shi'ite mystical sources: 'To know me as light is to know God and to know God is to know me as light. He who knows me as light is a faithful believer of whom God has tested the heart for the faith' (*ma'rifatī bi l-nūrāniyya ma'rifatu llāh wa ma'rifatu llāh ma'rifatī bi l-nūrāniyya man 'arafanī bi l-nūrāniyya kāna mu'minan imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li l-īmān*).[18] The light that can be 'seen' in or by the heart is thus attributed to the face of ʿAlī the archetypal theophanic being. These initial facts on the role of the gaze held on a sacred figure, founded on a complex and subtle theology of the imam, have equally affected 'popular' religiosity. By way of example, one can specify several portraits of ʿAlī from the Qajar era, some of which depict him accompanied by his two sons, at the museum of Saint Ma'ṣūma's mausoleum in Qumm; or also at the Imam Ali museum in Tehran, where one finds inscriptions in Persian of the following kind, presented as being the words of the First Imam: 'He who looks at and kisses my portrait (*shamā'il*), every day after the dawn prayer, it is as if he accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca sixty times'; and 'He who constantly beholds my portrait will avoid difficulties of every sort and he who doubts it is not a believer'.

Translation with comments of the original anonymous Dhahabi treatise 'What Is *vejhe*?'

(The notes as well as the texts in brackets are mine; digressions having little or no relationship with our topic as well as eulogistic expressions have been deleted.)

Greetings to the Face of God who brings peace and security to he who is faithful[19] [in Arabic followed by a free translation in Persian. The text continues in Persian]. There is no doubt that the ultimate Prophet and each of the Impeccables [i.e. Fāṭima and the Twelve Imams] are each the most noble Face of God as well as His most resounding proof of existence, His hand of power, His all-seeing eye and His all-hearing ear. With everything that was written beforehand, based on the book of the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*[20] and other trustworthy sources, what has just been said does not need supplementary proof. However, in order to obtain benediction from it, a tradition will be held up as an example; it is taken from the *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* by Shaykh Ṣadūq [Ibn Bābūya, d. 381 AH/991 AD], one of the most reliable sources of the hadith [see below]. Secondly, in regard to the meaning of the *vejhe*,[21] one of the most arduous questions on the initiatory path and the knowledge of the mystics, a remark made by the Imam [ʿAlī] Commander of the Believers, constituting decisive proof, will be added. And now, the hadith reported by Shaykh Ṣadūq in the *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā,* on the nature of the Master of the *Walāya* [i.e.ʿAlī][22] and the fact that he is the Face of God: [The Arabic text of the Hadith and its Persian translation follows. Due to the lack of relevance to our topic, the beginning of the long list of transmitters of the hadith has been deleted.] ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā [the Eighth Imam] reports from his father Mūsā b. Ja'far [the Seventh Imam; the list goes up the lineage of the imams] ... from his father ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, from the Prophet, from the angels Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, who reports from God who declares:

> I am God. There is no god save from Me. I created creatures with my power. I chose amongst them my messengers and amongst them, I chose Muḥammad as friend, intimate confidant and elected representative, messenger as well as envoy along with my creatures. And I chose ʿAlī for Muḥammad, I chose him as his brother, legatee, lieutenant and messenger of his work after him. I elected ʿAlī as my curate in addition to my servants so that he explains to them my Book, so that he judges them according to my justice. I established ʿAlī as the friend who guides away from distraction, like my threshold, like my abode where he who enters is saved from fire, like my fortress where I protect he who takes refuge

there from every bad thing in this world and the next. I have made of ʿAlī my face; I will never turn my face away from he who turns his towards ʿAlī. I have made of ʿAlī the proof of my existence in the skies and on earth for the entirety of my creatures so that I do not accept any of their acts if they do not add faith to the *walāya* of ʿAlī and at the same time to Muḥammad's, my messenger's. ʿAlī is my hand, great above my servants; he is the kindness with which I gratify those I love. The servants that I love, and whom I have taken under my benevolence, I grant them the *walāya* and the friendship of ʿAlī while those who suffer my anger, suffer it because they have ignored ʿAlī, his *walāya* and his friendship. I swear by my glory and my greatness that he who loves ʿAlī will be protected from fire and I will welcome him into my garden; he who turns away from the love of ʿAlī will know my anger and I will hasten the fire towards him, what a vile destiny![23]

[The text continues in Persian.] In the Qur'anic commentary of *Burhān*, in the exegesis of verse 88 of sura 28, 'Everything is mortal except his face', Imam Ṣādiq [the Sixth Imam] reports: 'Us, the people of the Prophet's family, we are that immortal face.'[24] The main reason for the quotation of this sort of tradition is to show that the Infallible Proof [i.e. the imam or more generally the Impeccables, either the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, or the imams] is the eternal Face of God. He who wants to turn toward God has to turn toward this face.

The people of the mystical gnosis called *vejhe* the act of turning toward the divine face.[25] What does it mean? In saying that the imam is the divine face, does one mean his face and his physical appearance? As we said previously, one of the most difficult theological and philosophical notions in the remarks of the enlightened and of the wise men is the spiritual practice of *vejhe* and the contemplation on the presence of the adored being, thanks to this practice. Technically, one also calls it meditation (*tafakkur*) or just mental form [or 'face'] (*ṣūrat i fikriyya*), as Mawlavī sung [Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī Rūmī, d. 672 AH/1273 AD. The verse comes from his *Mathnavī*; it is a variant of verse no. 3207, 'History of the Bedouin and the Philosopher', Daftar 2[26]]:

Through the practice of *dhikr* [rhythmic repetition of a sacred word], a path opens
Thanks to the practice of *fikr* ['meditation'], [the form] of the King appears.

dhekr ān bāshad ke bogshāyad rahī
fekr ān bāshad ke pīsh āyad shahī.

Or again, Shaykh Shabistarī [Sa'd al-Dīn Maḥmūd, d. 720 AH/1320 AD. The verse comes from his *Golshan e rāz*, the answer to the first question, verse 2[27]]:

> Meditation is going from the illusory to the real,
> It is seeing the universal in the particular.
>
> *tafakkor raftan az bāṭel sū-ye ḥaqq*
> *be jozv andar bedīdan koll-e moṭlaq.*

The difficulty in understanding this question arises from the fact that people of God only spoke of it symbolically, which is, for example, the case of the verses that have just been quoted. The reason is that the vast majority of men are incapable of exceeding the limits of the sense organs and their understanding is undermined by this fact. Yet, these divine questions go well beyond not only the senses, but also reason. This is why one can only speak allusively of subtleties like the *vejhe.* In order to demonstrate the veracity of the fact that the cult practice of the people of knowledge and perfection only happens thanks to the *vejhe,* it is sufficient to mention a remark made by the treasurer of the secrets of the Revelation after Muḥammad, the Master of the *walāya* [ʿAlī], the Commander of the Believers. Thus, we will have no need for a reasoned argument.

In the book *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ,* Shaykh Mufīd (d. 413 AH/1022 AD) reports from Aṣbagh b. Nubāta [a famous disciple of ʿAlī], mentioning his chain of transmitters:

> ...From the height of the pulpit of the Kūfa mosque, ʿAlī thus addressed the people: 'Question me before you lose me! Here resides knowledge. In my mouth I have the saliva of the Prophet; question me as I possess the science of beginnings and of ends'.[28] At that moment, a man named Dhiʿlib known for his eloquence, knowledge and courage, got up and said: '...Commander of the Believers! Have you seen your Lord?' ʿAlī answered: 'Be careful, Dhiʿlib! Would I adore a Lord that I had not seen?' 'So describe him.' 'Poor man! One cannot see Him by looking; hearts see him by the reality of faith.'[29]

The quotation of this extract of the sermon [of ʿAlī], taken from the *Ikhtiṣāṣ*, aims to demonstrate that, according to the word of the Commander of the Believers, seeing God is possible thanks to the vision by the heart. He who has reached the 'realities of faith' can see Him and he knows the terms of this vision. Therefore, the beginner in affairs of faith does not have the

right to deny that and he has to know that the gaps of unjustified negation are amongst the most dense and dark veils between God and creatures. He should also know that believing in the reality of this vision is a necessary condition for the perfection of his faith. He should overcome obstacles that keep God from him through spiritual progression and asceticism, under the guidance of divine instructors who have themselves overcome these obstacles, as Master Rāz [Abū l-Qāsim Sharīfī Shīrāzī, one of the great masters of the Dhahibiyya order, d. 1286 AH/1869 AD] said so aptly:

> Thanks to his love, I have reached a point
> Where I see nothing other than the eternal Witness
> The universes and everything found therein were eclipsed
> When I reached the eternal Face of God
> In these immense spaces beyond space
> I flew, without wings, for thousands of years
> And there only I saw the Face of Truth
> Everything I say and hear is thanks to Him.

From everything that has just been written, we can conclude the following:

1. The infallible imam is the Face of God.
2. Through the imam, a vision of divine beauty is possible, not with physical eyes, but with the eye of the heart and thanks to the realities of faith. Since the imam is himself the entirety of the faith realities, he therefore represents the direction of prayer in the heart in the act of adoration of God.[30] However, this has nothing to do with his physical body; one must disappear into his *walāya* in order to be reborn there eternally, so as to achieve his holy vision by the heart and to be able to declare: 'I would not adore a Lord that I had not seen' [a long section follows that is given over to the fact that the Impeccables' vision cannot be false since no evil creature, in this case Satan, has the power to embody them].

Analysis of a panel from the Vesel collection

In the *shamā'il* shown in Plate 2,[31] ʿAlī, a circular halo around his head, is kneeling down, forearms crossed and holding Dhū l-faqār on his thighs. We have already seen the resemblance of this position to a characteristic posture of the Sufi *dhikr*. Indeed, *dhikr* expressions decorate the panel all around the portrait: right at the top, as one might say it should be, is the expression *yā ʿAlī*; then, from top to bottom and from right to left: *yā Bāqī* (beginning faded), *yā Qayyūm* (ending faded), *yā Dayyān, yā Burhān, yā Ghufrān, yā Subḥān, yā Samīʿ* (beginning faded), and *yā Baṣīr* (ending faded).[32] Finally,

two verses divided into hemistiches are written at the top and bottom of the portrait, respectively, in horizontal writing to the left and to the right, and in vertical writing from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top. We believe that their symbolic allusions have now been deciphered thanks to information taken from ancient texts and our treatise on the *vejhe* practice. The first verse reads:

> As long as the love of ʿAlī is reflected in the mirror of the heart
> One can say that my heart is the place where divine mercy
> shows itself.
>
> *tā dar āyīne- ye del mehr- e ʿAlī jelve namāst*
> *mītavān goft delam maẓhar-e alṭāf-e khodāst.*

The second verse reads:

> The Lion of God [ʿAlī] came into being,
> Thus every hidden secret was revealed.
>
> *asadollāh dar vojūd āmad*
> *dar pas-e parde har če būd āmad.*

The position of ʿAlī, the *dhikr* expressions, and the poems professing ʿAlī's theophanic secrets, the beatific vision of his love, which is reflected like a light in the heart, all create strong connections among our *shamā'il*, the practice of the vision by the heart in general, and the exercise of the *vejhe* in particular. In my opinion, this cluster of mutually corroborating information seems to back up the words of the dervish from Shiraz regarding the portable *shamā'il* as an aid to mystical contemplation.

Another *shamā'il* of ʿAlī, a varnished painting on a little papier mâché mirror box in the History Museum in Bern, is, in this respect, entirely comparable to our *shamā'il.* Indeed, on the edges of ʿAlī's portrait, in which he is surrounded by his two sons, his companions and angels, several verses, of which the first three follow, are finely calligraphied:

> Here is the portrait of the Lion of Truth, the Friend of God,
> Or is it the mirror reflecting God?
>
> *ṣūrat-e shīr-e ḥaq valī-ye khodāst*
> *yā ke āʾīne-ye khodāy namāst?*
>
> When wisdom contemplated the image of the face of ʿAlī,
> Wisdom declared that it was the mirror of God's beauty.
>
> *dīd čon ʿaql naqsh-e rūy-e ʿalī*
> *goft āʾīne-ye jamāl-e khodāst.*

> The place where divine Light is expressed is the beauty of ʿAlī,
> It is in him that the secret of the creation of God appears.
>
> *maẓhar-e nūr-e ḥaq jamāl-e ʿalī-st*
> *va ndarū serr-e ṣonʿ-e ḥaq peydāst.*[33]

What consolidates this hypothesis even more is that the initial usage of the *shamā'il,* especially the portrait of ʿAlī, is not unique to the Dhahabiyya Order. We know it is equally part of the *waṣla* of the Khāksār dervishes.[34] The Bektashiyya are inheritors of the Ḥurūfiyya doctrine on the sacredness of the human face and its theophanic nature, as well as the belief that the calligraphied name of ʿAlī serves as a powerful aid to meditation and contemplation.[35] The figure of God appears on the face of the Bektashi man because of the name of ʿAlī: the *ʿayn* is featured in the arch of the eyebrow, and the *lām* is formed by the line of the nose and the *yā'* by the curve of the moustache. Thus, from the two sides of the virtual, vertical median line of the face, two 'mirrored' ʿAlī-s appear covering the face. In this way, iconographically one could say, an identity is established between the being of the enlightened individual – represented by his own face – ʿAlī and God.[36] This spiritual doctrine is widely certified; let us just mention these verses from the famous Bektashi poet Ḥilmī Dede Bābā (d. 1907), which illustrate our point clearly:

> I held a mirror in front of my face
> ʿAlī appeared in my eyes
> I looked at myself
> ʿAlī appeared in my face.
>
> *tuttum aynayi yüzüme / Ali göründü gözüme*
> *nazar eyledim özüme / Ali göründü gözüme.*[37]

In this respect, it is noteworthy that certain portable *shamā'il*s equally contain a mirror. In some pieces of the Vesel collection, the surface that bears the portrait of ʿAlī slides out like a drawer to reveal a mirror. Thus, he who contemplates the panel can go from ʿAlī's image to the reflection of his own face and vice versa.

It is true that the word 'icon' possesses a technical meaning in Christianity in general, and in Orthodox Christianity in particular, but we can easily apply the term to the portable *shamā'il* if we attach a more general meaning to the word, that of the sacred work of art such as Plotinus proposes, a definition, moreover, on which the Christian definition of the icon is founded.[38] This definition is based more on the gaze of the subject

than in the form of the object that is being looked at.[39] Regarding the contemplation of the statue of the temple, for example, Plotinus speaks in the *Enneade* (1, 6–9 and 11, 1–13) of the look that is not 'of the mortal eyes', but the look that the 'interior eye' mysteriously executes, an exercise of concentration that transforms the looking subject:

> [In order that the sacred piece of art can carry out its role] it is necessary that the looking eye becomes the same as the object that is being looked at, in order to apply oneself to contemplating it. An eye could never see the sun without having become similar to the sun, nor could a soul see beauty without being beautiful.

Even more relevant to our topic is this inscription regarding icons from a tenth-century oriental church: 'Small is the image you have under your eyes; immense is he who carries the image of the Infinite. Revere the prototype of which here you only have the image.'[40] This iconic function of the *shamā'il* is equally manifest in another piece of the Vesel collection, a piece made in India on which ʿAlī's portrait is surrounded by a sort of mandala, an aid to meditation and contemplation in several Indian religions and faiths (Figure 2).[41]

The portable icon, the 'pocket *shamā'il*' according to the words of our dervish, therefore forms a powerful link between Shi'i pictorial art and the mystical brotherhood, or even between popular beliefs and Sufi traditions. This link is not the only one; other characteristic connections can also be flagged up: the screens on which the scenes of the holy history of Shi'ism are painted are called, almost everywhere in Iran, 'dervishes' screens' (*pardeh-ye darvīshī*), and the stories told in front of these screens by narrators are called, especially in Khorasan, 'dervishes' stories' or even 'the true stories' (*ḥikāyāt e darvīshī/ḥikāyāt e ḥaqīqī*).[42] We know that many of these travelling narrators have belonged, and do still belong, to the Khāksāriyya brotherhood.[43] Very popular expressions in Iran regarding ʿAlī apparently all came from milieus belonging to Sufism or *futuwwa*: 'May the hand of ʿAlī protect you' (*dast-e 'Alī negahdārat*), 'May Murtaḍā ʿAlī's shadow be on your head' (*sāye-ye Murtaḍā ʿAlī bar sarat*), 'May ʿAlī be your support and protector' (*ʿAlī posht o panāhat*), 'O ʿAlī, help' (*yā ʿAlī madad*), 'Alī king of men, the man of the battlefield' (*ʿAlī shah-e mardān mard-e meydān*) and so on.[44] However, the spiritual practice of the icon of the Shi'i saints, and of ʿAlī more specifically, possibly shows in the most meaningful way to what degree the borders between learned religion and popular religion, and between ancient doctrines and existing beliefs and practices, can be porous. Here as well, as in numerous other cases, the union of art and mystical thought and practice forms the most solid connection between the two borders.

Figure 2 Watercolour on paper (24 × 23 cm.) Inv. no. 2003, 197, 12. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

NOTES

This article is translated by Mrs. O. Fairless to the English from its original French text.

1. This Persian meaning of the term *shamā'il (shamā'el,* to be more precise, according to Persian pronunciation) is surprising. It is probably an indirect usage of the Arab feminine plural of the word *shimāl*, which means, amongst other things, clothes (especially coat and turban), as well as innate quality or noble character (for this meaning, our word is also the plural of *shamīla*). It is perhaps for this reason that in Persian one very often uses the pair *shikl* and *shamā'il* to describe either the physical form and moral qualities or the physical form and the clothes that cover it. In this study, the word is considered, as in Persian, masculine singular.

2. It is, however, possible that this kind of object, showing the portraits of Shi'i saints, became particularly popular during or after the reign of the Qajar sovereign Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (1848–96), who made great efforts to promote religious painting. He was particularly devoted to the image of the First Imam. See, for example, Gobineau 1859, p. 316; Massé 1960, p. 164 sqq.
3. Regarding the myth of the complete ban of human portrayal in Islam, false but nonetheless persistent, see the classic study of Arnold 1965, p. 6 sqq; also the wonderful pages on the subject by Melikian-Chirvani 1987, pp. 89–117. For a broader discussion concerning the mediaeval period, see Barry 2004; and for an analysis that goes up until the contemporary period, see Héberger and Naef 2003; Naef 2004.
4. Regarding the question of veiling and unveiling figures in Islamic representations, see the relevant comments of Milstein 1986, p. 539 sqq.
5. Regarding the pronunciation of *faqār* and not *fiqār* more conventional, see al-Bakrī Abū 'Ubayd, 1364–71/1945–51, I/156 and III/1026. The word literally means 'double-bladed sword', probably meaning 'double-edged'. This is without doubt why, in iconography, ʿAlī's sword is strangely drawn with a blade whose extremity is divided into two! Regarding this sword, which was, according to tradition, brought by the angel Gabriel to Muḥammad, who then handed it over to ʿAlī, see, for example, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī n.d., section 4 of chapter 4; al-Kulaynī n.d., I/337 sqq.
6. See Abū Sa'īd Abū l-Khayr 1334/1956, p. 90, quatrain 615. Obviously the poet is playing with the double meaning of the Arab word *fatḥ:* victory (in allusion to the victorious character of the First Imam in combat) and opening/inspiration (in reference to the latter's role as an initiatory guide).
7. Pieces of the Vesel collection (see below). Regarding the image in general and ʿAlī's effigies in Shi'ism, see Paret 1968, pp. 224–232. For discussion on the two shapes of the halo and underlying Sassanid and Christian influences, see Milstein 1986, pp. 537–538; Fodor 1987–8, p. 266; idem 1992, p. 124.
8. Rogers 1970; Peterson 1981; Chelkowski 1989; Fontana 1994; Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997; Diba and Ekhtiyar 1998; Bolūkbāshī 2001; and now Mohammad-Zadeh 2008. The list is obviously not exhaustive.
9. Amir-Moezzi 2003, pp. 108–109 (now in Amir-Moezzi 2006, pp. 263–264).
10. Amir-Moezzi 2007, pp. 112–145 (1st ed. 1992, same pagination); idem 1999 (this version was brought up to date and completed the previous study); idem 2003.
11. Regarding this collection and others concerning popular Shi'i art, graciously offered by Živa Vesel to the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) in Marseille, see now Kleiber 2006, pp. 67–71.
12. See studies indicated in notes 9 and 10.
13. Amir-Moezzi 1997.
14. Amir-Moezzi 1996 (now in idem 2006, II-3).

15. See Amir-Moezzi 2007; also Vajda 1970; this study, although it makes reference to the vision by the heart (pp. 44–45), concerns only the first part of the theological problem, concerning the impossibility of the vision of the divine Essence. All in all, the distinction between these two ontological levels of God, and, therefore, the two complementary parts of the problem of the vision, is not dealt with. Also see now the synthetis of Ess 1991–7, V/83 sqq.
16. See the study indicated in note 14.
17. See, for example, Ibn Bābūya 1404/1984, majlis 28, hadith no. 9, p. 138 and majlis 58, hadith no. 1, p. 361 (no mention of *dhikr ʿAlī*); idem 1390/1970, chapter 158, hadith no. 2145. One must note that the word *dhikr*, translated here as 'to remind', also denotes the famous mystical practice of the rhythmic repetition of a word or of an expression; in this case, *dhikr ʿAlī* from the hadith means for a Sufi the repetition of the name of ʿAlī. Finally, let us clarify that it is by basing itself on this sort of tradition that a religious authority like Ayatollah Nakhjavānī justifies the legality of the portrait art of Shi'i saints; Nakhjavānī 1406/1985, pp. 86 sqq (quoted by Mohammad-Zadeh 2008, pp. 100–101).
18. For sources, see the study indicated in note 9, pp. 113–115 (now in Amir-Moezzi 2006, pp. 268–270).
19. *Al-salām 'alā wajh allāh alladhī man āmana bihi amina*. The expression concerns ʿAlī, called, as in many other places, the Face of God. The expression is found, for example, in ʿAlī's *Ziyāra* (prayers recited during the pilgrimage on the tomb of the First Imam; innumerable editions), ziyāra no. 7.
20. The book is quoted in note 5. Regarding this work and its author, see Amir-Moezzi 1992; Newman 2000, chapters 5 and 7.
21. The word *vejhe* is the Persian pronunciation of the Arab word *wijha*, which literally means 'face of a body, of an object'. It also has the Qur'anic meaning of 'the direction in which the object of prayer is found' (Qur'an 2: 148: *wa li kulli wijhatun huwa muwallīhā*, 'For everyone a direction in which to turn in prayer', after the elegant French translation of Berque 1995, p. 45). The use of the word in Dhahabi practice doubtlessly includes the two meanings.
22. Regarding the *walāya*, a central notion in Shi'i faith, see Amir-Moezzi 2002 (now in idem 2006, II-7).
23. Ibn Bābūya 1378/1958, chapter 31, hadith no. 19, II/49. See also idem 1404/1984, majlis 39, hadith no. 10, pp. 222–223.
24. This is a quotation from the famous Qur'anic commentary *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107 or 1109 AH/1695–6 or 1697–8 AD); see al-Baḥrānī n.d., sub Qur'an 28:88. One finds this exegesis of the Face in practically all the Shi'i *tafsīr*s; see, for example, Amir-Moezzi 2007, p. 116, note 225.
25. The author is making a pun with the terms belonging to the root *WJH*: *wajh* (face), *wijha/vejhe* (practice of contemplation), and *tawajjuh/tavajjoh*

(direction, the action of going toward something); for more information on the same subject, see my study: Amir-Moezzi 2003, pp. 111 sqq. (now in idem 2006, pp. 266 sqq.).

26. Rūmī n.d., Daftar 2, p. 427.
27. Shabistarī 1351/1972, p. 59.
28. Regarding saliva as a means of transmitting knowledge and spiritual virtues, see Giladi 1998; Amir-Moezzi 2007, pp. 192–195; idem 2000, pp. 56–58 (now in idem 2006, part I-1, pp. 41–43).
29. al-Mufīd n.d., 'Khuṭbat li amīr al-mu'minīn', pp. 235–236. For another version of the same speech and sources, see Amir-Moezzi 2007, p. 123.
30. It is noteworthy that in the technical vocabulary of Shi'ism, 'faith' (*īmān*) means the esoteric dimension of Islam, the teaching of imams or Shi'ism. The term differs from *islām*, which means, still in the technical lexicon, the exoteric dimension of Muḥammad's message; see Amir-Moezzi 2007, index s.v. In addition, it is necessary to state that for Rāz Shīrāzī, the Imam of Light contemplated in the heart of the enlightened Dhahabi is the 'black light' of the spiritual form of the Eighth Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the alleged founder of the order; see idem 2003, pp. 105–106 (now in idem 2006, pp. 260–262).
31. Also reproduced in Kleiber 2006, illustration no. 7 (in black and white), p. 69.
32. Regarding these Names, see Gimaret 1988, index, s.v.
33. Diba and Ekhtiyar 1998, panel no. 163. We are dealing with a work of Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, made in 1288 AH/1871 AD, for the sovereign of Iran, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, Bernisches Historisches Museum, exhibit no. 73/1913.
34. Modarresī Čahārdehī 1368/1989, p. 23.
35. Regarding the subject in general, see De Jong 1989 (with illustrations); Mélikoff 1997 (with illustrations); Bağci 2005 (with illustrations); Uğur Derman 2005 (with illustrations); Mir-Kasimov 2006.
36. Mélikoff 1997, pp. 45, 51; idem 2005, pp. 83–110.
37. Ḥilmī Dede 1909, p. 30; quoted by Mélikoff 2005, pp. 101–102. In his poem, Ḥilmī passes constantly from ʿAlī to God, of whom *ʿAlī* is precisely one of the Names, and then to himself. The identity of the self (which is different to the ego), of the imam and of God is illustrated by the Shi'i saying that philosophical and mystical works never stop mentioning in different ways: he who knows himself, knows his imam who is his Lord; see, for example, Āmolī 1969a, pp. 270, 307–309, 315, 464; idem 1969b, p. 675; Mullā Ṣadrā 1964, pp. 186–188; idem 1283/1865, pp. 475–476; Sharīf Iṣfahānī n.d., the introduction, in particular pp. 13–15. For purely Sufi sources, see Amir-Moezzi 2001, especially pp. 17–18 (now in idem 2006, pp. 352–353).
38. Grabar 1945, p. 20.
39. In this regard, see the subtle reflections of Hadot 1997.
40. Quoted by Lafontaine-Dosogne 1987, p. 109.
41. The inscriptions, in more than vague Arabic, at least indicate the place and date of the making of the *shamā'il: hādhā al-naqsh* (sic) *imām* (sic) *al-awwal*

ʿAlī b. abī Ṭālib bāb waṣī allāh (sic) *wa ʿAlī allāh* (here is the image of the First Imam, ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib, threshold to the legatee of God [sic, maybe instead of 'threshold *and* legatee'] and ʿAlī is God); *fī sana khamsa* (sic) *wa mi'atayn ba'd al-alf sana 1205 fī balada Bamba'ī* ([made] in the year 1205 [1790–91] in the province of Bombay). However, one should ask oneself if one can trust this information.

42. See, for example, Panāhī Semnānī 1376/1996, pp. 397 sqq.
43. See Gramlich 1965–81, vol. III, especially pp. 85–88; Tortel 1999, chapter IV, pp. 191–197.
44. See Mīhandūst 2001, pp. 10–16; Karīmiyān Sardashtī 2001, pp. 40–45.

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When *Nubuvvat* Encounters *Valāyat*: Safavid Paintings of the Prophet Mohammad's *Mi'rāj*, c. 1500–50

Christiane Gruber

Introduction

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY WITNESSED THE ESTABLISHMENT of Shi'i Islam as the officially declared state religion and the efflorescence of the visual arts in Persian lands under the aegis of Safavid rule (1501–1722). Shi'i religious practices and beliefs fluctuated and then became standardised, while their development within paintings and manuscript illustrations reveals the extent to which the Safavids employed pictorial means in a greater bid for religiopolitical legitimacy. Paintings produced for the first two Safavid rulers, Shah Ismail I (r. 1501–24) and his successor, Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76), in the capital cities of Tabriz and Qazvin provide a meaning-laden visual corpus of paintings. With it, we can gauge the intentions of these two early Safavid monarchs to promote their own political authority and their greater religious world-view prior to the theological crystallisation and artistic 'Golden Age' that would come to symbolise the reign of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587–1629) in Isfahan, the much celebrated capital worthy of 'half of the world' (*nesf-e jahān*).[1]

Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp – bolstered by the Shi'i conviction in Ali's divinely decreed *valāyat*[2] (guardianship), the primordial and creative light (*nūr*) of the Prophet Mohammad and all the imams, and the desire to bridge a chasm between exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bātin*) knowledge – spearheaded what can only be understood as a revolution in the pictorial arts of Persia. This revolution includes many aspects that have been discussed in recent years by a number of scholars.[3] A key and markedly unprecedented aspect was the production of depictions of the

Prophet Mohammad with a facial veil, at once obscuring his personal traits and containing his effulgent, prophetic light.[4] Under the aegis of these two rulers, and intended for their closest circles, the image of Mohammad that had been developed within the context of ascension (*mi'rāj*) paintings that they had inherited was literally 'transfigured'. These two early Safavid rulers put an end to the well-established Ilkhanid (1258–1356) and Timurid (1401–1506) conventions of representing the Prophet with his facial features fully visible (Figure 3).[5] This sudden pictorial transformation became so successful and so normative for the ensuing centuries that scholarship has tended to overlook the fact that this phenomenon occurred as a result of a number of religious, historical and political factors specific to the early Safavid period. In other words, certain pictorial motifs established *c.* 1500 had almost no precedents and, thus, must be seen as cultural products that are historically contingent and tinted with very particular symbolic overtones.

The goals of this study consist in charting these new motifs and in exploring the multiple factors that led to their emergence through an analysis of a select group of paintings of the Prophet Mohammad's *mi'rāj* produced during the reigns of Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp. The three major pictorial innovations that appear in ascension paintings at this time are the rending of the skies as the Prophet ascends, the inclusion of his white veil to obscure his facial features, and the addition of a lion figure in the skies as the celestial stand-in for Imam Ali.[6] These three new leitmotifs in early Safavid ascension paintings, it is argued, form a particular visual exegesis of Shi'i readings of the Prophet's *mi'rāj*, intended to provide pictorial expositions of, and support for, doctrinal points at a time when Shi'i exegetical texts (*tafāsīr*) are wanting. These visual materials thus serve as bridges between the earliest Shi'i interpretative works on the *mi'rāj* by authors active during the third–sixth/ninth–twelfth centuries[7] and later Safavid exegetes working during the eleventh/seventeenth century.[8]

Because Safavid paintings of the tenth/sixteenth century provide a certain glimpse into Shi'i hermeneutic practices that are otherwise not elucidated in contemporaneous textual traditions, they open new ways for understanding the role of the Prophet's ascension in early Safavid Shi'i thought. Equally, the application of this bioapocalyptical narrative to the religious domains and political endeavours of Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp can be traced through pictorial materials. For both royal patrons, visual materials offered fitting opportunities to engage in discussions about either their own nature(s) or their unrivalled proximity to the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali or God.

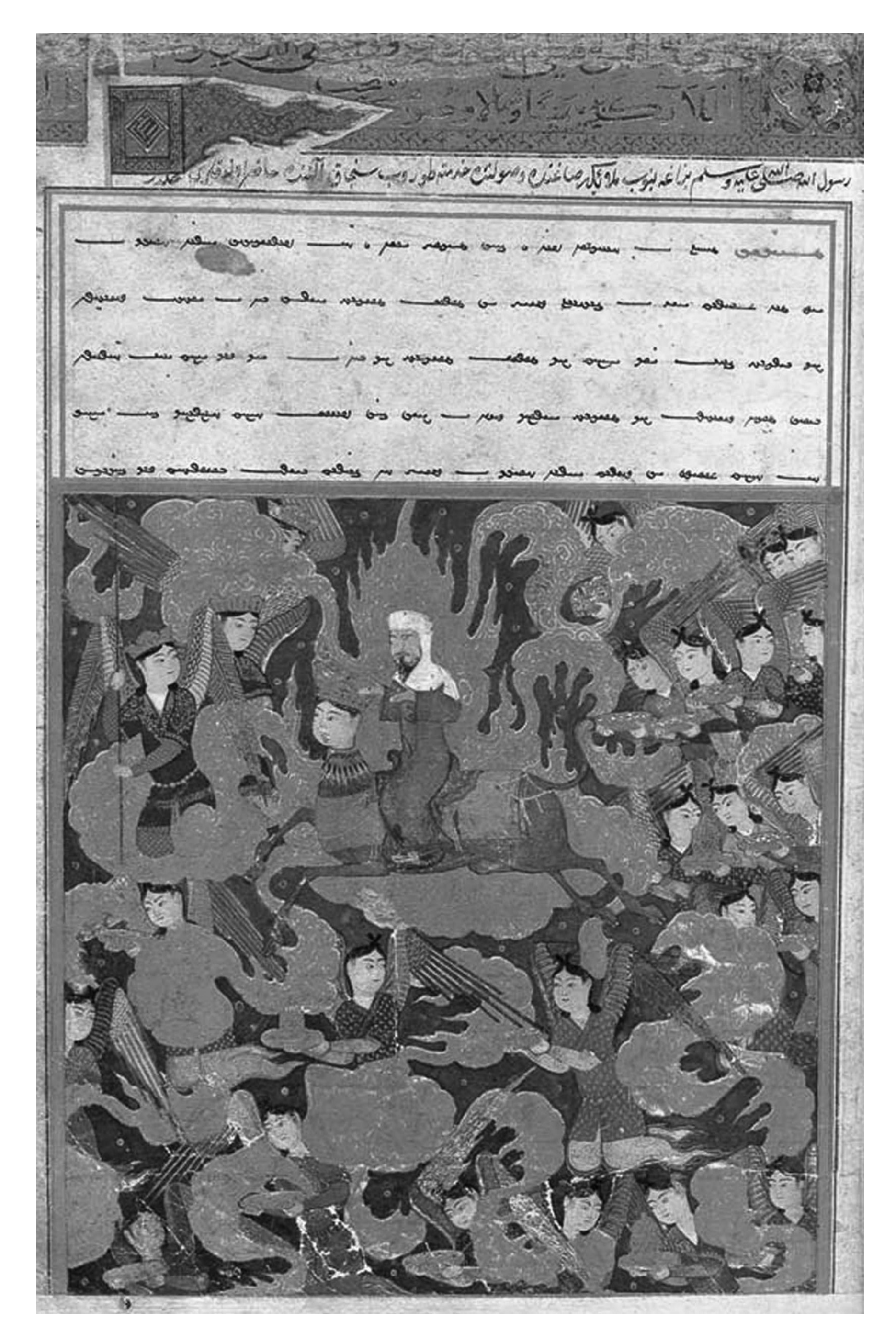


Figure 3 The Prophet's *Isrā'* from Mecca to Jerusalem, Anonymous, *Mi'rājnāma* (The Book of the Prophet's Ascension), probably Herat, *c.* 840/1436–7, BnF Sup Turc 190, fol. 5r.

In the case of Shah Ismail, paintings depicting a newly-veiled Prophet ascending toward an aperture in the sky not only served to create a purposeful confusion of the protagonist's identity, but also to reveal a clear linkage between the heavenly and the earthly spheres through the dual motions of ascent (*ᶜurūj*) and descent (*nuzūl*). The conflation of this God-shah's personality with that of the Prophet, Ali and even God in ascension paintings appears to draw inspiration from the compendium of poetry (*dīvān*) that Shah Ismail wrote in Turcoman Turkish under the pen name (*takhallus*) of Khatā'ī.[9] The fact that the earliest ascension painting depicting the Prophet Mohammad with a facial veil appears during Shah Ismail's rule reveals[10] – through the ingenious pictorial device of the facial covering – this monarch's attempts to create a kind of 'identity confusion' and to argue that he partakes in both God's (*khudā'ī*) essence and Mohammad's (*Mustafā'ī*) nature.[11] In a similar manner, an opening in the sky, as depicted in at least one *mi'rāj* painting from the time of his reign, attempts to convey not only the Prophet's entrance into the Abode of God but also Shah Ismail's own entry into the realm of pre-eternity (*azal*) and his manifestation in the world as ruler of mankind.[12]

Although these paintings attest to Shah Ismail's proclivity toward self-aggrandisement, they also provide a testament for the kind of syncretistic Shi'ism that he espoused during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. He blended a cult of personality through his compelling Sufi lineage, tracing his ancestry back to Shaykh Safī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 1334), the eponymous founder of the Safavid dynasty. Through this Sufi pedigree and a number of other socioreligious mechanisms – especially building tribal loyalty and promoting messianic salvation – he inspired fervour in his principal adherents, the nomadic tribes (*oymaqs*) of Shi'i Anatolian Turks known as the 'Red Heads' (Qızılbāş), who, in turn, worshipped him as an incarnation of God on earth.[13] Ascension paintings patronised by Shah Ismail operate within this idiosyncratic socioreligious system of Shi'ism profoundly tinged by Sufi thought, messianic expectation and factional loyalties. As a consequence, they do not advance 'orthodox' Twelver Shi'ism; on the contrary, they provide visual testaments for the monarch's peculiar amalgam of Shi'i messianism, Sufi spirituality and Qızılbāş tribalism.

Some of the pictorial elements – including the rending of the skies, the Prophet's facial veil and the Safavid headgear known as *tāj-i Haydarī* – that appear in paintings made during Shah Ismail's reign were either expunged, modified or 'regularised' by his successor, Shah Tahmasp. These changes resonate powerfully with his attempts to purge the more excessive features of his father's ideology and with his efforts to weaken, once and for all, the

influence of the Qızılbāş. From 1524 to 1536 he engaged in civil war with these 'Red Head' factions, and later, during 1554–5, he crushed a group of Sufis who proclaimed him Mahdī.[14] By removing the tribalism and other anathemas (such as cannibalism) of Qızılbāş Shi'ism, by subduing the messianism of ultraist Sufism, and by attracting to Persia Twelver Shi'i *ᶜulamā'* from Jabal ᶜĀmil (in modern-day Lebanon), Bahrain and Iraq,[15] Shah Tahmasp engaged in a sustained campaign to eradicate the more extreme religious elements and groups (*ghulāt*)[16] of his father's reign in order to homogenise, regiment and install Shi'ism as the official religion of the Safavid polity.

These major adjustments are corroborated by textual sources and, it is argued, similarly reiterated in visual materials, particularly paintings of the Prophet's ascension. Within the context of these compositions, we see the heavens' aperture – as the celestial perforation for Shah Ismail's divine descent united to the Prophet's ascent into God's realms – disappear during Shah Tahmasp's reign. The Prophet's facial veil becomes a standardised feature, symbolising his primordial *nūr* rather than providing the potential for conflation between the Prophet's and Shah Ismail's personas. Finally, the inclusion of the lion figure as the celestial image (*mithāl*) or angel (*malak*) representative of a metaphysical Imam Ali in lieu of an opening in the sky not only provides a pictorial expression of the revelation of his vicegerency (*valāyat*) upon the Prophet's *mi'rāj*, but also allows Shah Tahmasp to return to more standard Shi'i interpretations of the ascension narrative rather than to follow his father's co-optation and manipulation of the *mi'rāj* trope.

The various modalities that form, alter and codify the religious and political identities of these first two Safavid rulers form the central subject of the present study. By highlighting a select body of visual evidence – in particular, images of the Prophet's ascension as included in illustrated Persian epic or romantic stories and pictured divination manuals (*Fālnāmas*) – dated or datable to the reigns of Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp, one can trace a number of ideological transformations and the arenas in which they participated. Pictures at this time not only functioned as a visual intensification of the reading experience, but also carried within their iconographic makeup subtle messages about a particular Safavid monarch's nature or the specific religious system that he aspired to deploy and implement. In the cases of these two rulers, paintings of the *mi'rāj* are presented as the pictorial counterpart, and staging ground, for the final transformation of extreme Qızılbāş Shi'ism into normative Twelver Shi'ism, established once and for all in Persian lands over the course of Shah Abbas I's reign.

Breaching heaven's canopy

After Shah Ismail's victory against the White Sheep (Aq Qoyyunlu) Turkmen and his proclamation as ruler in 1501, a number of manuscripts fell into his hands. Among these was a copy of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizāmī (d. 1218), originally produced for the Timurid prince Bābur b. Bāysunghur (d. 1457) and continued for the Aq Qoyyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan by his son, Khalīl. At Uzun Hasan's defeat and death in 1478, his brother Ya^cqūb Beg (r. 1478–90) took over the manuscript, had its text completed in 1481, and ordered a dozen paintings to be added by his court painters Shaykhī and Darvīsh Mohammad. Nonetheless, at the moment of Shah Ismail's victory, the manuscript still remained unfinished. For this reason, in 1504–5 the ruler commissioned his artists in Tabriz – possibly including Sultān Mohammad, the head of his book atelier (*kitābkhāna*) at the time – to add eleven paintings to the manuscript.[17]

A superb painting of the ascension survives on a single folio excised from this manuscript's *Makhzan al-Asrār* (The Treasury of Secrets), the first book of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* (Figure 4). It depicts the Prophet Mohammad on his human-headed winged steed Boraq as he flies over the Ka^cba and a number of other buildings toward a round opening in the sky, through which a number of angels observe the scene below.[18] Angels in swirls of clouds present a variety of offerings, while Mohammad – his facial features now damaged, his two black tresses floating on either side of his ears, his headgear with the Safavid rod inserted into his turban – crosses both hands at the chest in a gesture of prayer.

In the lower right corner of the painting, a number of men stand around the Ka^cba, while in the lower left corner another group of men stand in a row below palm trees and two minarets. Immediately above the trees appear a *minbar* and a domed brick building bearing the dated inscription *Allah, Mohammad va Ali, sana 910 [1505]*. Above this edifice appears another domed structure covered in blue-and-gold star tiles, with a smaller portal on the left bearing the inscription *al-bāqī huwā Allāh* (He Who remains is God). Around the folio's left vertical and top horizontal margins, a number of shrinelike way stations and trees dot a hilly landscape, suggesting a pilgrimage route through the Hijāz toward Mecca.

The inscription that bears the date 910 AH/1505 AD provides a *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the ascension painting, implying that a large portion of the painting was executed during Shah Ismail's reign. Despite some damage and loss of pigment, the painting's specific features and motifs strongly suggest that the composition was carried out by a Safavid artist, perhaps Sultān Mohammad himself, active in Shah Ismail's

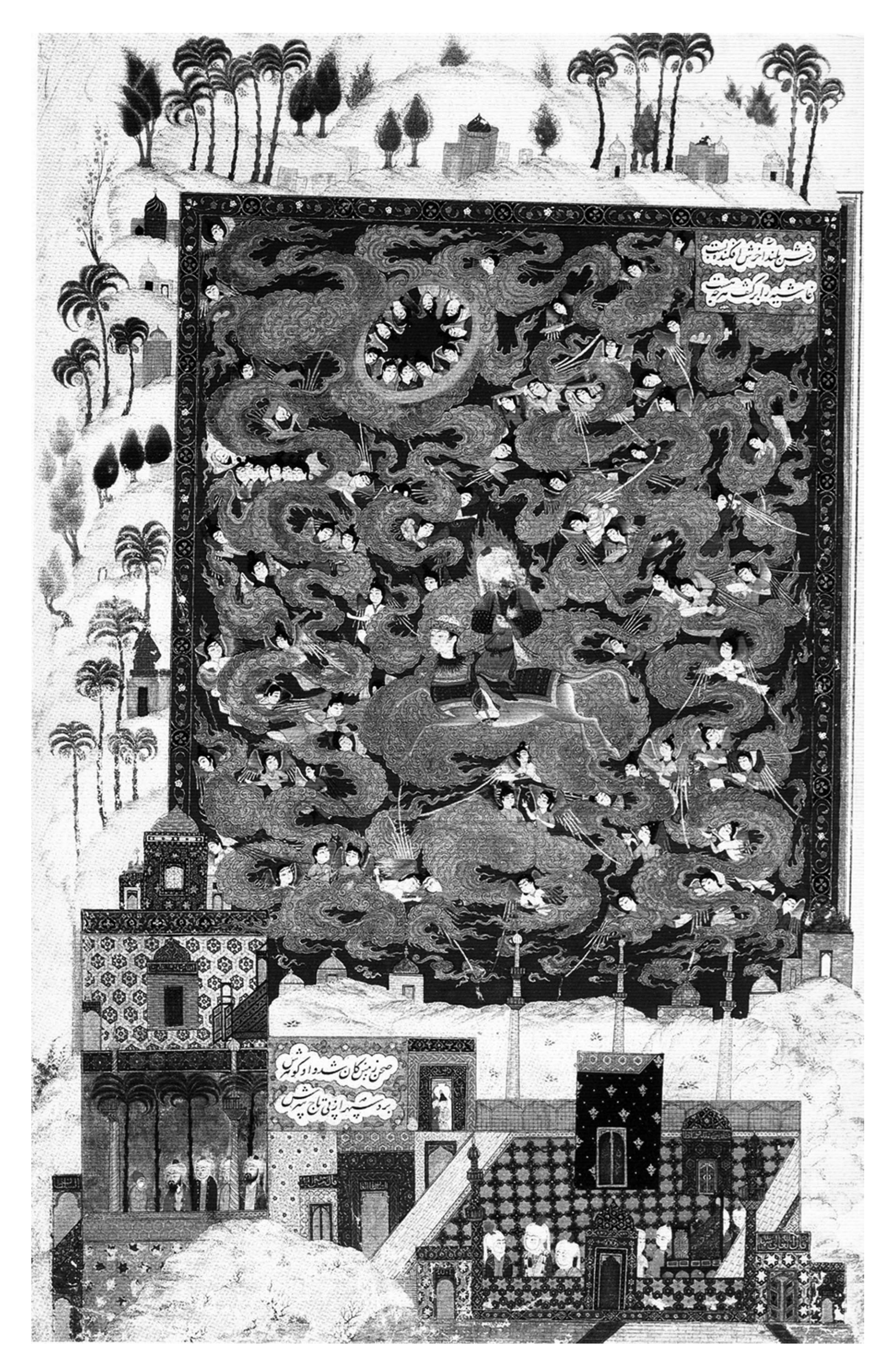


Figure 4 The Prophet's *Mi'rāj* over Mecca and other holy sites, Nizāmī, *Makhzan al-Asrār* (The Treasury of Secrets), Tabriz, 910/1505, KC III.207.

book atelier. The painting thus provides evidence for the style of early Safavid painting in Tabriz.

The composition reveals some of the new iconographic developments of *mi'rāj* paintings during this transitional phase. One new feature consists of a round opening in the sky, from which several angels look down at the Prophet. This oculus splits open the fabric of the sky and is rendered in a daring and experimental perspective, demonstrated also in late fifteenth-century artistic practice in Italy.[19] This particular composition – the tearing open of the celestial spheres through the vehicle of the prophetic heavenly ascent – has implications for the understanding of the *mi'rāj* narrative, its representation and its symbolic relevance to contemporary religious and political life during the early Safavid period.

At first glance, it is surprising that the ocular opening in the skies was not included in ascension paintings prior to the time of Shah Ismail's reign. Nizāmī's *Mazkhan al-Asrār*, in fact, describes the Prophet's ascension as a breach through the covering of the fixed stars (*satr-i kavākib*)[20] and the curtain of physical creation (*parda-yi khalqat*)[21] drawn so that he might reach the abode of the Lord. Likewise, in Nizāmī's text, Mohammad's lifting of the head is described as going above the veil of nature (*girībān-i tabī'at*) at the same time as the hand of union (*tawhīd*, i.e. God) draws back the curtain (*hijāb*).[22] Such metaphors stress Mohammad's arrival in the realm of the Lord as a rending, breaking and pulling open of a covering, curtain or veil; that is, a piercing through the skies to reach a space beyond temporal boundaries and freed from earthly causalities.

So why, one must ask, does the motif of the celestial opening appear only at the time of Shah Ismail if it was already present for three centuries within the text of Nizāmī's poetry? Surely artists working during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods would have seen in the Persian author's metaphorical language a source of inspiration for their compositions. Yet not one of the earlier ascension paintings takes this particular cue from the author's text to include a celestial opening. The answers, therefore, must be sought in the historicoreligious factors that marked Shah Ismail's reign, namely, his cult of personality and his claims to divinity through the allegorical potential of the upward and downward heavenly motions of the Prophet Mohammad and Ali on the night of the *mi'rāj*.

As early Shi'i exegetes make clear, the goal of Mohammad's prophecy, or *nubuvvat*, consisted primarily in receiving the revelation of Ali's guardianship, or *valāyat*. For example, Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381 AH/991 AD) goes so far as to state that God 'opened the doors of the skies and the celestial veils' so that Mohammad could see Ali as

the ultimate source of light on the night of the *mi'rāj*.[23] Because Shah Ismail considered himself the 'Truth' (*al-Haqq*),[24] God incarnate, the Prophet Mohammad and the essence of Ali, one can see in the depiction of the ascending protagonist a conflation of all these champions of the faith, breaching the celestial veil to receive the divine decree of rightful rulership.

Furthermore, the opening in the sky not only pays tribute to Nizāmī's text and Shi'i exegesis but also strongly suggests the monarch's ascent toward divinity and his arrival to mankind from pre-eternity. As Shah Ismail himself proclaims in verse form:

> By the Shah's command I had come from pre-eternity
> Do not be troubled for now I have come again.
> From pre-eternity I am in love with the Twelve Imams
> But now I have come to this mundane world.[25]

Based on evidence culled from the ruler's poetry, one can suggest that the depiction of the opening in the sky is closely bound up with contemporary circumstances. Therefore, the oculus motif conveys both the motion of the prophetic ascent to heaven and the sovereign's descent to earth. It reflects Nizāmī's poetry and espouses, in powerful pictorial terms, Shah Ismail's claims of celestial origins.

Although the painting is damaged – thereby making it difficult to ascertain the Prophet Mohammad's facial features – the hint of a *tāj-i Haydarī* on his head provides an overt and unmistakable Shi'i overtone to the painting. This motif, much like the oculus, ingeniously blends the elements found both in Nizāmī's and in Shah Ismail's poetry and, as a result, blends Sufi and Shi'i themes that tend to typify the Safavid period.[26] In the *mi'rāj* encomium of his *Makhzan al-Asrār,* Nizāmī states that the Prophet was 'crowned monarch (*Shāh*) of the Night of Ascension'.[27] Other writers agree that the Prophet's ascent granted him the exalted epithet 'Wearer of the Crown' (*sāhib al-tāj*). To draw a powerful parallel, Shah Ismail also mentions his own 'red crown' (*qızıl tāj* or *qırmızı tāj*), 'crown of felicity' (*tāj-i sa*ᶜ*ādat*), and 'crown of sovereignty' (*tāj-i dawlat*)[28] in his *Dīvān*, three symbolic terms derived from *mi'rāj* poetry. He states:

> In the time of the mystery of *kuntu kanzan*,[29] he was the Light of Mohammad and now has manifested himself to the world crowned with a red crown. His name is Ismail and he of the essence of the Prince of the Faithful; on seeing him the outsiders would prefer to turn to stone.[30]

Here, Shah Ismail audaciously asserts that he is synonymous with the pre-existent Mystery of God and the Light of Mohammad, and also engendered from the same metaphysical fabric as Ali, the Prince of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Moᶜminīn*). He becomes manifest on earth endowed with the symbol of kingship and supremacy; that is, the Safavid red crown (*qırmızı tāj* or *tāj-i Haydarī*), whose form was revealed to his father, Haydar, in his dream of Ali.[31] In this manner, the Safavid *tāj* – much like the crown bestowed upon the Prophet on the night of his ascension – stands as material evidence for both protagonists' journey to, and return from, the celestial realms.

In this ascension painting of 910 AH/1505 AD, the Prophet Mohammad appears to wear Safavid headgear. This detail cannot be coincidental or simply a reflection of dress at the time; rather, such a deliberate iconographic marker opens the way for interpretative ambiguity and latitude, a possible pictorial overlapping between the Prophet Mohammad and Shah Ismail, the new *padeshah* and self-proclaimed 'Essence of God'. Within this poetical context, it appears that a *mi'rāj* painting such as this one could have served the dual purpose of praising the Prophet and legitimising the claims of Shah Ismail, the self-proclaimed divine sovereign on earth, through the inclusion of two innovative motifs: the celestial oculus and the *tāj-i Haydarī.*

The facial veil: a visual double entendre

Shah Ismail's artists did not take long to establish an entirely new and subsequently dominant tradition of depicting the Prophet with a white facial veil. For instance, just five years after the *mi'rāj* painting of 910 AH/1505 AD, artists utilised the white facial veil in a painting of the Prophet's ascension included in another illustrated copy of Nizāmī's *Makhzan al-Asrār* transcribed in 915 AH/1509 AD (Figure 5).[32] The oculus in the sky and the bird's-eye view of Mecca and the Kaᶜba have been omitted in this composition; instead, the white facial veil takes pride of place in the painting's centre, and a beautifully decorated dome appears amidst a rocky landscape in the composition's lower right corner.

It is possible that this unidentified dome provided a particularly Shi'i inflection to the narrative. Rather than representing the recognisable buildings that the Prophet visited on his ascension, such as the Dome of the Rock or the Kaᶜba in Mecca, the artist opted to include this architectural quotation as an oblique reference to a dome on any of the Shi'i shrines in Najaf, Karbala, Samarra and Mashhad, which Shah Ismail had restored during the period 914–16 AH/1508–10 AD,[33] the very same years that saw the execution of this particular *mi'rāj* painting. The architectural

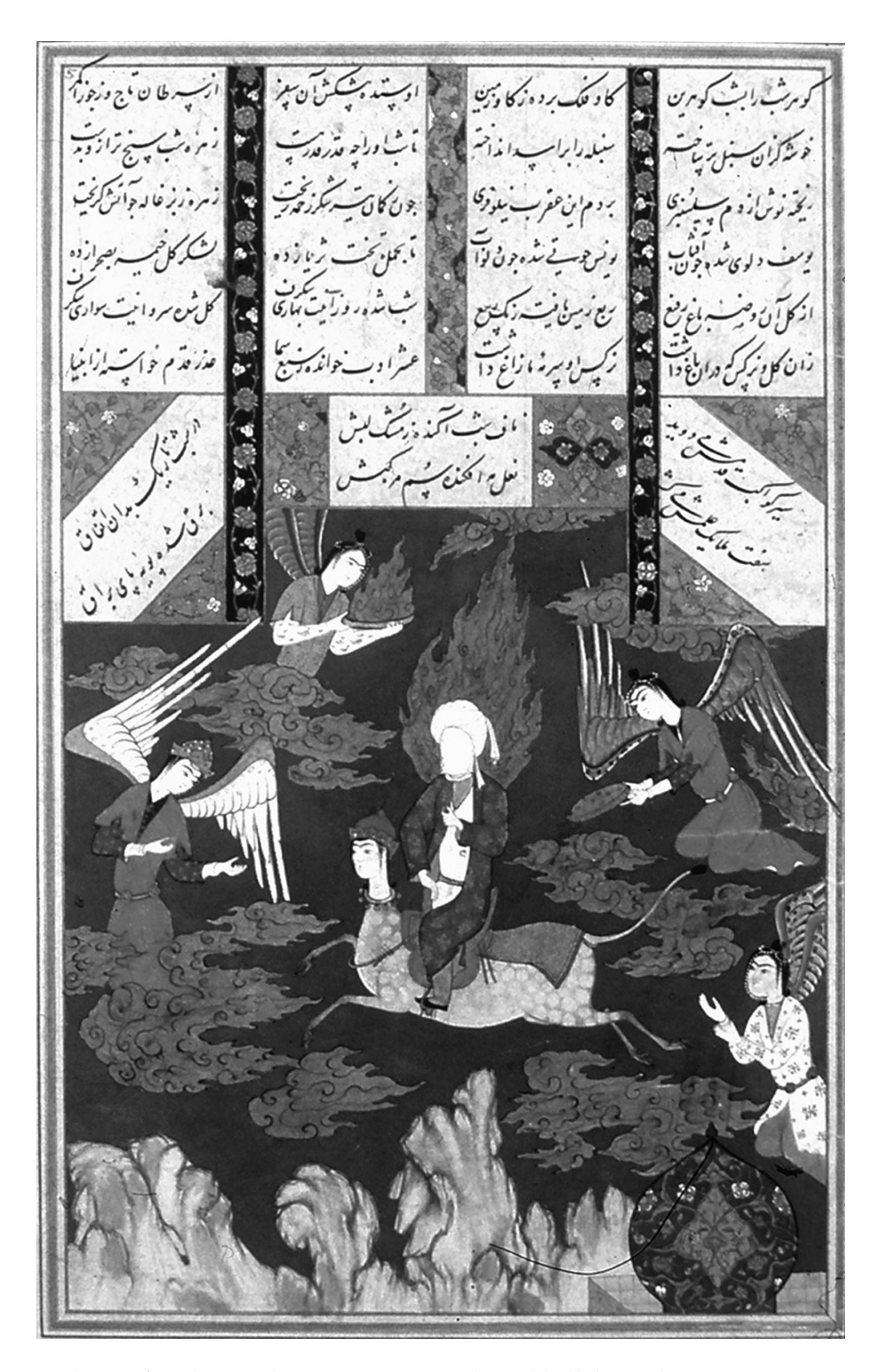


Figure 5 The Prophet's *Mi'rāj* over a domed building, Nizāmī, *Makhzan al-Asrār* (The Treasury of Secrets), Iran, 915/1509–10, CBL Pers. 182, fol. 5r.

reference to these pious deeds served as a reminder of the ruler's political legitimacy and his claim to divine authority through the vehicle of the prophetic ascension, and his political legitimacy via his pious architectural endeavours. The purposeful vagueness of iconography may have discreetly buttressed Shi'i elements in the story of the Prophet Mohammad's ascension and, by extension, supported Shah Ismail's claims to divinely decreed authority. It also may have promoted one of the tombs of the Shi'i imams and, thus, could replace the virtual *hajj* present in the ascension painting of 910 AH/1505 AD with an alternative (visual) pilgrimage to Shi'i holy sites. The story and depiction of the Prophet's ascension thus may have been updated, reworked and amended in order to suit the current ruler's concerns over his status and legacy.

The use of the facial veil in tandem with geographical ambiguity also may reveal some of Shah Ismail's politicoreligious concerns at this crucial turning point in the pictorial arts, that is, a time that witnessed the efflorescence of what some scholars have called 'religious' painting.[34] It is not in Nizāmī's text that one can find the textual justification for the use of the facial veil; quite to the contrary, the text immediately above the 915 AH/1509 AD painting pays poetical tribute to the musk-scented lips of the Prophet, intimating that they are visible and not hidden under a cover.[35] Because a text–image relationship is weak here, all clues to this pictorial convention point instead to the confluence of religious and historical circumstances during the reign of Shah Ismail. The Safavid ruler's claim to legitimacy revolved primarily around his divine status and his belief in the superiority of (his version of) Shi'i Islam because he viewed himself as the direct offspring of the Prophet Mohammad, as well as the carrier of his and Ali's primordial light and divine essence. He states quite clearly in his poetry that he is similar to the Prophet 'in flying' (*uçmaqda*), and his presence on earth is, much like the appearance of the corporeal Mohammad, an arrival of God's radiant light (*yine nūr-i khudā geldi*).[36]

The conflation of the two personas in Shah Ismail's poetry shows a strong inclination toward fusing earthly with otherworldly concerns, followed by the fusing of similar symbolic motifs in artistic enterprises. Thus, the facial veil conceals the true identity and the effulgent, primordial flux of the protagonist ascending toward God; in this case, perhaps rising above the dome of the Najaf or Karbala shrine. This pictorial occlusion intensifies the connection between the Prophet Mohammad and Shah Ismail because both represent the ultimate spiritual leader or guide. In this way, the symbolic hyphenation of Shah Ismail and the Prophet is achieved adroitly through the pictorial

ambiguity or double meanings made possible in the veiled face, the headgear, the figure's act of flying and the unidentified dome.

Shah Ismail's assertions, such as his declarations of being an invincible Mahdī worthy of ritual worship and adoration, had to be cast aside five years later after his crushing defeat by Ottoman forces at the Battle of Chaldiran (920 AH/1514 AD). In the wake of the decimation of his Qızılbāş forces and his own personal desacralisation, his hyperbolic rhetoric could no longer be sustained. By 1524, his successor, Shah Tahmasp, realised that a new language of legitimacy had to be formulated. He abandoned Turcoman Turkish and adopted Persian, the language of Safavid lands west of the Anatolian border, a move that finds an interesting parallel in his change of the Safavid capital from Tabriz to the more southerly Qazvin *c.* 1555. His newly-created entourage of 'imported' orthodox Shi'i theologians and his declarations of repentance for his sins[37] reveal him as a religiously-minded ruler whose actions revolved around rectifying his and his father's immoderate acts. In line with these initiatives, paintings of the *mi'rāj* from the time of his rule discard certain motifs, such as the heavenly oculus; refine others, such as the facial veil; and introduce new elements, such as the celestial, leonine figure of Ali. These pictorial changes can be seen as publicising Shah Tahmasp's abandonment of his father's vitiated tenets and his decisive alignment with mainstream Imāmī Shi'i thought.

After his first major commission – a large, beautiful and well-known *Shāhnāmeh* (The Book of Kings) produced *c.* 1522–5[38] – Shah Tahmasp commissioned his calligrapher, Shah Mahmūd al-Nīshāpūrī, and several of his court painters to produce a royal copy of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*.[39] Executed in Tabriz in 946–50 AH/1539–43 AD, the manuscript contains seventeen paintings, including a superb illustration of the Prophet's *mi'rāj* (Figure 6) attributed to the painter Sultān Mohammad and located at the beginning of the *Haft Paykar* (The Seven Beauties).[40] The composition shows a veiled Mohammad mounted on Boraq flying past the haloed moon, accompanied by a host of angels presenting a variety of offerings. On the left, the angel Gabriel points the way, while other angels hold a hanging mosque lamp, a censer, a green robe, a crown, plates of fruits and gems, and even a bound codex, all elements that are developed in this painting with more detail than in any other extant ascension composition.[41]

The emphasis on the angels' many offerings depicted in this ascension image could be interpreted as the painter's keen interest in following details elaborated upon within Nizāmī's text. Artists certainly considered the contents of the narratives that they illustrated. Further, it is possible to



Figure 6 The Prophet's *mi'rāj*, Nizāmī, *Haft Paykar* (The Seven Beauties), Tabriz, *c.* 946–50/1539–43, BL Or. 2265, folio 195r.

suggest that, in addition to utilising a text-connected image, the artist was responding to a particular historical juncture during which Shah Tahmasp strove to offset the questionable principles, along with their elaboration within the visual arts, that had been espoused by his father. The painting's details – such as the green mantle, hanging mosque lamp, censer and Qur'an – point exclusively to Mohammad's elevated status. Thus, they frame and concentrate the viewer's focus upon the Prophet alone. They engage the observer in a sustained contemplation of the Prophet's character and essence and invite the observer to pray on Mohammad's behalf, following the example of the kneeling angel with two raised hands located in the lower right margin of the painting. In effect, these details subtly supplant the very suggestive, dual nature of the oculus motif.

Within this specific semiotic system, the facial veil could fulfil a different role than at the time of its introduction into painting during the rule of Shah Ismail. Details from the text of Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*, upon which the painter overtly draws to craft his painting, help explain the metaphorical qualities of the facial cover as translated visually by the painter. In this mystical text, the veil represents the existential boundary between the realm of the seen and unseen, sight and insight. The author describes Mohammad's unveiled sight of God in his *mi'rāj* encomium in the following words:

> When sight is veiled by direction,
> The heart's not free from false perception;
> But when direction's hid from sight,
> He who has none is seen aright.[42]

Optical perception and sight (*nazar* and *dīda*) are questioned because they are subject to misconception and misguidance. When all physical and temporal elements are obliterated and sight appears disguised as non-sight, only then can true, inner acuity occur. To stay true to the meaning of true sight as non-sight and the invisibility of Mohammad's primordial light, the artist has provided a veil over the Prophet's face so that the observer is forced to move from a visual experience of the Prophet to a spiritual one.

The facial veil here appears tempered through allegory and is provided with a Sufi meaning in which esoteric (*bātin*) experience surpasses exoteric (*zāhir*) knowledge, a thematic also well developed within Shi'i Islam. Shah Tahmasp would certainly have found this conceptual framework in harmony with standard Shi'i theology, thus effectively distancing himself from his father's artful experiments in pictorial equivocation. As a result,

the appearances of the facial veil as utilised during the time of Shah Ismail's and Shah Tahmasp's reigns must be seen as different from one another. They were closely aligned with the various symbolic, nuanced and rather complex delineations of divinity and esotericism, rather than simply formed through a strict prohibition on figural imagery.

Encountering Ali, the lion of God

Shah Tahmasp's concern with finding and establishing the hidden meaning of the Prophet's authority developed even further in the following decade. It is likewise reflected in the creation of two oversize illustrated divination books (*Fālnāma*s), whose texts are attributed to the seventh Shi'i imām, Ja^{c}far al-Sādiq.[43] The first illustrated *Fālnāma* was started in the late 1540s and finished in the early 1550s, a time during which the ruler seems to have grown quite superstitious.[44] Twenty-eight remaining paintings (or fragments thereof), probably executed by the painters Āqā Mīrak and ^{c}Abd al-^{c}Azīz, are dispersed throughout international collections today, sometimes in combination with the facing text folio providing a forecast (*fāl*) about propitious times to engage in trade or battle, marry or set out on a journey. The second illustrated *Fālnāma* attributed to Shah Tahmasp's commission still exists as a bound whole and appears to date from *c.* 1555 to 1560, although some of its paintings were retouched, at times heavily, at a later date.[45] Paintings from these two *Fālnāma*s draw on themes from the Qur'an, Hadīth and *Qisas al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), as well as on more obscure subjects from Iranian folklore and Shi'i legends. Moreover, both include paintings of the Prophet's *mi'rāj* with attending textual prognostications, which help us to determine some of the ruler's religious concerns at that time.

The first *Fālnāma* ascension painting represents the Prophet Mohammad mounted on Boraq, his face hidden by a white veil, as he presents his signet ring to a lion while the angel Gabriel guides him with a green banner (Plate 3).[46] Around him appear a number of angels bearing flaming platters, a censer, a rosewater jug, a sword and two gold sandals. Although the offerings recall the elements present in the earlier painting included in Shah Tahmasp's *Khamsa*, the emphasis on the celestial lion and the Prophet's presentation of the signet ring establish the composition's central action. The second *Fālnāma mi'rāj* painting follows the same pattern, although the Prophet's body was removed and repainted later in the form of a flaming bundle (Figure 7). Here, too, a number of angels offer flaming platters to the Prophet, Gabriel holds a green banner and guides him to the left of the composition, and a celestial lion appears in the frame's upper left corner.



Figure 7 The Prophet's *Mi'rāj* toward Ali as a Lion, Ja^{c}far al-Sādiq (attr.), *Fālnāma* (The Book of Divination), Tabriz or Qazvin, *c.* 1550, SLB Eb445, p. 58.

Both *Fālnāma* texts accompanying the ascension paintings predict a positive outcome for the augury seeker, and the text belonging to the first *Fālnāma* ascension painting (Plate 3) begins the prognostication with the following words:

> From the house of Umm Hānī', when on the night of the *mi'rāj* he reached the sanctuary of God's might, everything mentioned on that night, Ali told him on the next day.

> You, augury seeker, be aware that in your omen has arrived a sign of the ascension of the Lord of Beings, the Last of the Creatures, the Mercy to People, and the Measure of all Men.[47]

Buttressed by such verbal proclamations, both paintings include the image of the lion in the upper left corner in order to suggest that the ultimate goal of the ascension is, in essence, the vision of the angelic Ali and his granting of authority upon Mohammad's prophecy through the latter's signet ring. In this manner, Safavid pictured divinatory manuals, such as those commissioned by Shah Tahmasp, make use of the ascension as a means of forecasting an optimistic future while legitimising Shi'i rule.

These paintings draw upon older Shi'i Hadīths and oral tales that stress that the goal of the Prophet's ascension consists of the revelation to Mohammad of the identity of his successor, Ali, already present since time immemorial within God's abode.[48] In one Hadīth, for example, God informs Mohammad that Ali is 'the first' (*al-awwal*), 'the last' (*al-ākhir*) and the 'all-knowing' (*al-ᶜālim*), attributes typically reserved for God as found in the Qur'an.[49] The quasi-synthesis between God and the imam suggests that the ultimate objective of Mohammad's ascent consists not of a vision of God per se or the granting of the five daily prayers, as many Sunni narratives of the ascension would have it, but of the divine disclosure of Ali and a confirmation of his celestial status.[50] In these narratives and paintings, the *mi'rāj* therefore endows Mohammad with prophecy (*nubuvvat*) through the ultimate revelation of Ali's rightful leadership (*valāyat*). Likewise, the paintings certainly fulfil particularly Shi'i religious functions as well.

In Shi'i thought, it is believed that an angel created in Ali's form existed in the sky since the beginning of creation so that every time a person desired to see the terrestrial Ali (*ʿAlī fī'l-ard*), he imagined his celestial image (*mithāluhu fī'l-samā'*).[51] Extant Shi'i tales largely describe this cosmic Ali in the shape of a lion. One oral narrative describes Fatemeh's dream of a moving star, which changed into a steel sword and then an enormous lion. The Prophet Mohammad quietly walked up to the lion, which suddenly lay down and licked his feet instead of attacking him. Upon giving birth to her son, Ali, Fatemeh nicknamed him *haydar* (lion) in memory of her dream. The Prophet also told Ali that he would become known as *Asadollah* (lion of God) and *Sayfullāh* (sword of God), terms referring back to the same portent dream.[52] In Shi'i written and oral accounts, therefore, Ali is described as preexistent, celestial, in the shape of a lion (*haydar* or *asad*) and accessible through mental and visual imagination.

These two *Fālnāma* paintings highlight the concerns expressed by early Shi'i Hadīths and *tafāsīr* and foreshadow the interests of seventeenth-century Shi'i theologians, such as al-Majlisī (d. 1700), in that they present the ultimate goal of the ascension as the Prophet's vision of Ali and the revelation of his *valāyat*. They also show a major alteration in the programme of previous ascension paintings, replacing the gift of the Qur'an (represented as a bound volume in Figure 6) with the vision of the celestial lion. This trend certainly responds to the opinions of Shi'i exegetes that the ᶜUthmānic codex (*mushaf-i ᶜUthmānī*) had been altered at the hands of the Sunnis, whom they accuse of having purposefully expunged mentions of Ali and his *valāyat*, the *ahl al-bayt* and the imams from the official Qur'anic recension produced during the middle of the first/seventh century.[53]

Similarly, Shi'i theologians contend that the original, uncorrupted and uncensored Qur'an, known as the Qur'an of Ali (*mushaf-i ᶜAlī*),[54] was revealed to the imam, who, in turn, became the 'Speaking Book' (*al-kitāb al-nātiq*).[55] By presenting Ali through this metonomy, these *Fālnāma* paintings – and many subsequent compositions included in Safavid illustrated epic and romantic manuscripts that depict the figure of the imam as a celestial lion (Plate 4)[56] – provide a new and primarily visual reading of the ascension story. In it, Ali is heralded as a primordial and metaphorical entity whose rightful leadership is communicated to Mohammad. Moreover, he represents the full, unadulterated, 'embodied' Qur'an as revealed to the Prophet on the night of his ascension, therefore filling in and rectifying ostensible textual omissions. These paintings thus transform the episode of the Prophet's encounter with God developed within Sunni sources into an explicit Shi'i disquisition on Ali's cosmic totality and divinely decreed viceregency.

Pictorial Polysemy

This study has attempted to trace some of the major developments in *mi'rāj* paintings produced during the reigns of Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp in an effort to uncover their possible links to religious and political beliefs during the first five decades of Safavid rule in Persia. The appearance of the celestial oculus can be seen as a motif supporting Shah Ismail's claims of ascending to the heavens in a motion suggestive of the Prophet's own *mi'rāj*. The rationale for the first appearance of the Prophet's facial veil at this time, and not before, also must emerge, then, out of the particular religiopolitical world-view of this ruler, who sought to fuse his identity with that of Mohammad, Ali and even God. The camouflaging of the protagonist's visage would have achieved the kind of conflated meanings

that the monarch sought to evoke until the time his claims of divinity and invincibility could no longer be sustained.

In the wake of such excesses, his son, Shah Tahmasp, moved to expunge extreme messianism and Qızılbāş tribalism from his father's form of Shi'ism, opting instead to establish a more mainstream version of Shi'i thought and practice in Persian lands. The celestial oculus disappears, an avoidance, perhaps, of the questionable claims of originating from, or ascending toward, the celestial realms. Furthermore, at this time, instead of perpetuating an 'identity crisis', the Prophet's facial veil appears regularised to denote Mohammad's unobservable, radiant and primordial light. Finally, the inclusion of the angelic leonine figure of Ali in ascension paintings functions visually to reinstate the supreme Shi'i meaning of the *mi'rāj*: the revelation of a pre-existential, cosmic Ali and his *valāyat* as the ultimate source of the Prophet's *nubuvvat*. Such Shi'i lion-ascension paintings were first established during Shah Tahmasp's reign, possibly as a more narrowed and focused doctrinal reaction to the ambiguous language of Shah Ismail's compositions.

Ascension paintings of the sixteenth century bridge the temporal gap between early and classical Shi'i exegesis (third/ninth–sixth/twelfth centuries) and later Safavid works of the eleventh/seventeenth century. They proffer, therefore, evidence of Shi'i concerns surrounding the Prophet's *mi'rāj* at a time when textual materials on the subject are scarce. For these reasons alone, they provide an alternate way for tracking the paths through which Shi'i belief systems were formed and transformed over the course of Shah Ismail's and Shah Tahmasp's reigns. The fact that certain pictorial motifs – such as the celestial oculus, the facial veil and Ali as an angelic lion – were taken up, developed, altered or discarded must be seen as evidence for the evolving and fluctuating history of Shi'ism, particularly during the early Safavid period. These motifs also underscore the fact that visual materials could serve as powerful loci for religiopolitical assertions, such as promoting a specific vision of rulership, maintaining the status quo, or establishing, once and for all, a perceived Shi'i 'orthodoxy'.

Notes

1. For a discussion of Safavid art, see in particular Canby 1999; Thompson & Canby 2003; Gray 1986.
2. Because this study analyses Persian materials, the Persian spelling *valāyat* is used instead of the Arabic *wilāya* or *walāya* (other terms in Arabic, Persian and Turcoman Turkish follow the MESA Arabic transliteration system, as well as the spelling style used throughout this volume). For a further discussion of the

concept of *valāyat* in Shi'i Islam, the ontological status of Imam Ali and his cosmological quiddity, see Amir-Moezzi 2002; republished in Amir-Moezzi 2006, pp. 177–207.

3. Early Safavid visual culture is discussed most prominently in Canby 1999; Rogers 1970; Thompson and Canby 2003; Welch 1979.
4. On the concept of the *nūr Muhammad*, see Rubin 1975; idem, 'Nūr Muhammadī', *E.I.*[2]
5. For a discussion of Ilkhanid ascension paintings, see Gruber 2010a and 2010b; Ettinghausen 1957. For a discussion of the Timurid 'Book of Ascension' of *c.* 1436–7, see Séguy 1977; Gruber 2008.
6. Another motif that appears in ascension paintings during the Safavid period, which is not discussed in this study as it appears during the seventeenth century, consists of representing the Prophet ascending through the celestial spheres (*aflāk*). The spheres are depicted, in a fashion typical of Islamic cosmography, as a series of concentric circles (see Gruber 2005, pp. 294–300).
7. Early Imami Shi'i exegetes such as Furāt al-Kūfī (d. *c.* 912), Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fl. 919), and al-ᶜAyyāshī (fl. early tenth century) promote an overtly Shi'i viewpoint of the ascension and the Sunni corruption of Qur'anic revelation. On the other hand, 'classical' authors such as al-Kulaynī (d. 941), al-Nuᶜmānī (d. *c.* 971), al-Tūsī (d. 1067) and al-Tabarsī (d. 1153) approach both themes in a less polemical and more conciliatory manner. On these early writers, see Bar-Asher 1999; idem, 'Tafsīr. ii. in Shi'ism', *E.Ir.*
8. These include most prominently Mullā Sadrā (d. 1640), Muhsin al-Fayd (d. 1680), al-Bahrānī (d. 1693 or 1697) and al-Majlisī (d. 1700). Much like early Imami writers, Shi'i theologians and exegetes of the eleventh/seventeenth century once again adopted a sectarian language and approach to both the Prophet's ascension and the revelation of the Qur'an. For a discussion of these authors' works, see Lawson 1993; Kohlberg 1987.
9. Minorsky 1942; Thackston 1988. For post-sixteenth-century poetry attributed to Shah Ismail, see Gallagher 2009. The term 'God-shah' is borrowed from Babayan 1994, p. 138.
10. Earlier paintings of the Prophet represent him unveiled. His facial features, although sometimes damaged, are depicted in illustrated Ilkhanid and Timurid 'Books of Ascension' (*Mi'rājnāma*s) of *c.* 1317–35 (TSK H. 2154) and 1436–7 (BnF Sup Turc 190), in ascension paintings dated 813–14 AH/1410–11 AD (BL Add. 27261), 870 AH/1465 AD (TSK R. 1976), 881 AH/1476 AD (TSK H. 761), and 900 AH/1494–5 AD (BL Or. 6810). One painting of the ascension in a manuscript of ᶜAttār's *Mantiq al-Tayr* (The Speech of the Birds) dated 860 AH/1456 AD (SB Oct. 268) includes a gold facial veil that appears to have been added above the Prophet's facial features at a later date.
11. Minorsky 1942, pp. 1032a and 1043a (No. 22).
12. Ibid., pp. 1034a and 1044a (No. 101); pp. 1036a and 1046a (No. 168); pp. 1039a and 1048a–1049a (No. 249).

13. On the Qızılbāş support of Shah Ismail, see Babayan 1994, pp. 135–138; Aubin 1970. The term 'Qızılbāş' was a derogatory term given by the Sunni Ottoman Turks to these Shi'i Anatolian Turks. The expression describes their distinctive headgear wrapped around a tall red rod marked with twelve incisions representing the twelve infallible imams of Twelver Shi'ism. This headgear is synonymous with 'Haydar's crown' (*tāj-i Haydarī*), the Safavid headgear named after Shah Ismail's father, Shaykh Haydar (d. 1488), the charismatic leader of the Safavīya Sufi order responsible for organising his followers into a fighting corps during the fifteenth century.
14. Babayan 1994, p. 137; Aubin 1970, p. 239.
15. Hourani 1986; Stewart 1996.
16. See Moosa 1987. For a detailed discussion of *ghuluww* and its intersection with Safavid religious identity, see Babayan 2002, pp. xxiii–xxviii.
17. Canby 1999, p. 17 and fn. 16. The original manuscript (TSK H. 762) consists of 317 folios and contains 19 paintings. The calligrapher, ᶜAbd al-Rahīm b. ᶜAbd al-Rahmān al-Khwārazmī al-Sultānī al-Yaᶜqūbī, states that he worked in the capital of Tabriz. Three paintings were removed from the TSK manuscript and are now held in the Keir Collection in London.
18. Robinson 1976, pp. 178–179.
19. The opening in the painting, depicted from a perspective of *di sotto in sù* (from below upwards), recalls the famous ceiling oculus painted by Andrea Mantegna in 1471–4 for the Camera degli Sposi in the Ducal Palace in Mantua (see Cordaro 1992, p. 30). In both compositions, angels or cupids and human figures open up a round space from the sky and peer at events transpiring below. One is struck by the contemporaneity of this pattern in both Italy and Iran. It is possible that this new Safavid motif was influenced by European portable materials, such as prints, that made their way to Iran (Sims 2002, p. 151). For a further discussion of the influence of European materials on Safavid arts *c.* 1550–1700, see Canby 1996, pp. 46–59.
20. Nizāmī 1945, p. 101, verse 167; Ranjabar 1372/1952, p. 27.
21. Nizāmī 1945, p. 102, verses 184–187 and 190–191; Ranjabar 1372/1952, pp. 29–30.
22. Ibid.
23. Amir-Moezzi 1996, p. 106.
24. Minorsky 1942, pp. 1037a and 1047a (No. 195). The ruler states: 'The Mystery of *Anā'l-Haqq* is hidden in my heart. I am the Absolute Truth [God] and what I say is truth'.
25. Ibid., pp. 1036a and 1046a (No. 168). The term utilised by Shah Ismail for 'this mundane world' is 'shop' (*dukkān*).
26. For a discussion of the thematic links between Sufism and Shi'ism, see Nasr 1970.
27. Nizāmī 1945, p. 99, verse 139.
28. Minorsky 1942, p. 1027a.

29. *Kuntu kanzan* are the first two words of a *Hadīth Qudsī* (Holy Saying), in which God Himself states: 'I was a Hidden Treasure. I wanted to be known, so I made creation.'
30. Minorsky 1942, pp. 1038a and 1048a (no. 211).
31. Canby 1999, p. 10.
32. The manuscript includes the date of Sha^{c}bān 915 (Nov.–Dec. 1509) on fol. 29v, and the calligrapher ^{c}Alī Kātib has signed the work on fol. 331v. The place of production is not provided, however. The manuscript contains twenty-nine paintings as well as the seal impressions of Shah Abbas I. For a brief description of the work, see Arberry et al. 1960, vol. 2, 40ff (CBL Pers. 182).
33. Hillenbrand 1986, p. 766; Canby 1999, p. 26.
34. Rogers 1970. Rogers argues that painting during the Safavid period can be called 'religious' because it is intended to accompany mystical and devotional literature and to fulfil religious functions such as the teaching of particular doctrines. He does not, however, consider the growth of these kinds of paintings as related to Shah Ismail's own religiopolitical constructs, a hypothesis that this study aims to advance.
35. Nizāmī 1945, p. 101, verse 169; Ranjabar 1372/1952, p. 27.
36. Minorsky 1942, pp. 1032a and 1043a (No. 22), and pp. 1039a and 1048a (No. 249).
37. Canby 1999, p. 83. He repented for 'forbidden acts' such as drinking and smoking in 1532 and later issued an Edict of Sincere Repentance in 1556, in which he outlawed the secular arts throughout his lands.
38. See Dickson and Welch 1981; Welch 1979, pp. 39–117; Hillenbrand 1996.
39. The paintings are signed by, or attributed to, various artists, including Sultān Mohammad, Āqā Mīrak, Mīrzā ^{c}Alī, Mīr Sayyid ^{c}Alī and Muzaffar ^{c}Alī (Welch 1979, p. 134).
40. The faces of the angels in the upper left corner were repainted later by Mohammad Zamān, who was responsible for repairing at least three other paintings in the manuscript around 1675 (Gray 1986, p. 906).
41. Sultān Mohammad pays heed to the many details described in the *Haft Paykar* by including such accoutrements. Nizāmī's text describes Mohammad's crown of rulership, his green prophetic robe (as offered by an angel), and his primordial light (the blazing gold aureole) as illuminating the celestial spheres like the moon. Furthermore, his heavenly aroma smells like sandalwood, ambergris and musk, scents that saturate the painting through its colours and the inclusion of an incense burner. The revelations granted to him on the night of ascension – that is, all that he 'brought with him' from the higher spheres – can be understood as the Qur'an, depicted as a bound codex carried by an angel. For the textual descriptions of these elements, see Nizāmī 1995, pp. 6–10; Ranjabar 1372/1952, pp. 47–55.
42. Nizāmī 1995, p. 9, verses 66–67; Ranjabar 1372/1952, p. 54.

43. For an overview of illustrated *Fālnāma*s of the Safavid period, see Farhad with Bagçı 2009; Tokatlian 2007.
44. Thompson and Canby 2003, p. 122; Welch 1985, pp. 94–95.
45. Rührdanz 1987.
46. Lowry et al. 1998, Vol. 2, p. 138 and fig. 171; Lowry and Nemazee 1988, pp. 124–125 (cat. no. 31).
47. The rest of the *fāl* text reads: 'Don't you worry as victory and triumph will overcome your affairs and your troubles will be solved [literally, doors closed to you will open and your bad luck will change], your wishes will be granted, and you will be fortunate in your life and in the Afterlife thanks to the Prophet and his family. Galen says: "If you are intent on setting out on a journey, go and you will be under God's protection. If somebody is absent, he will arrive. If someone is sick, give alms so that the illness can be exchanged for health." For every task you want to come out right, pray for the Prophet and his family, so that you will never see a bad day. Say, if God wills [it].' (WMA 1935.16).
48. Amir-Moezzi 1996, p. 101.
49. Ibid., p. 104.
50. On the topic of the Prophet's dialogue with God, at which time either Sunni or Shi'i concerns are promoted, see Colby 2010.
51. Ibid., p. 105.
52. Knappert 1985, vol. 1, pp. 238–239.
53. It appears that the Shi'i views of the Qur'an's createdness (*khalq al-Qur'an*) were adopted from Mu[c]tazili interpretations of the Holy Text during the third/ninth century. Shi'is used this notion to advance their claims that the [c]Uthmānic codex purposefully altered or omitted mentions of Ali and his *valāyat*, the *ahl al-bayt,* and the imams (Kohlberg 1973; Lawson 1991; Amir-Moezzi 1994, pp. 79–91). Some Shi'is also believe that entire chapters (*sūras*) were omitted from the Qur'an: these include *sūrat nūrayn* (the chapter of the two lights) and *sūrat al-walāya* (the chapter of vicegerency), both of which discuss Ali's elevated rank (Tisdall 1913; Eliash 1969).
54. This Qur'an is believed to have been revealed only to ʿAlī, who collected the sacred text into his codex (*mushaf-i ʿAlī*). This codex is believed to have been passed down to the imams until its disappearance with the Twelfth Imam, and it will remain hidden with him until his return at the end of time.
55. Ayoub 1988, p. 183.
56. For sample Safavid lion-ascension paintings, see *inter alia* Nizāmī's *Khamsa* dated 967–8 AH/1560–1 AD (BnF Sup Pers. 1956, fol. 88r); al-Nīshāpūrī's *Qisas al-Anbiyā'* dated 984 AH/1577 AD (SB Diez A, fol. 3, fol. 226v); al-Navā'ī's *Khayrat al-Abrār* dated 1006 AH/1598 AD (BL Add. 7909, fol. 13v); Fuzūlī's *Laylā va Majnūn* dated 1075 AH/1664 AD (BL Or. 405, fol. 11r); and Nizāmī's *Laylā va Majnūn* dated 1076–7 AH/1665–7 AD (BL Add. 6613, fol. 92v).

Institutional abbreviations

BL	British Library, London, United Kingdom
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France
CBL	Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland
KC	Keir Collection, London, United Kingdom
SB	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Germany
SG	Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
SLB	Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden, Germany
TSK	Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Turkey
WMA	Worcester Museum of Art, Worcester, MA

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Abbreviations:

E.I.[2] *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition (online).
E.Ir. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition (http://iranica.com).

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The Pictorial Representation of Shi'i Themes in Lithographed Books of the Qajar Period

Ulrich Marzolph

Introduction

THE QAJAR PERIOD WITNESSED A NOTABLE resurgence of Shi'i religious sentiment in Iran. In the political arena, the reasons for this phenomenon are linked to the efforts of the Qajar dynasty to legitimise its rule. From the vantage point of cultural history, the Shi'i impact is most visible in the areas of drama and literature. In particular, the dramatic re-enactment of the tragic events at Karbala, known as *ta'ziyeh* and often labelled the 'Persian passion play', experienced its formative period during the early days of the Qajar dynasty. The formation of *ta'ziyeh* resulted from the merging of the funeral processions staged on the day of *'Āshurā'* with a specific genre of Shi'i literature to whose growing popularity the *ta'ziyeh* also contributed.[1] Works of this genre follow in the vein of Hoseyn ebn Vâ'ez Kâshefi's fifteenth-century compilation *Rowzat al-shohadā'* (The Garden of Martyrs) and are commonly known as books of *rowzehkhāni* – literally the reading or recitation of the book *Rowzat al-shohadā'*; sometimes they are also called *marsiyeh* (lament) or *maqtal* ([narrative about a] scene of combat).

Profiting from two concurrent developments, several works of *rowzehkhāni* literature compiled by contemporary authors gained a considerable popularity in the Qajar period. One was the genre's growing appeal, and the other was the introduction to Iran of the newly invented technique of lithographic printing in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[2] The most widely read book of the genre, judging from the numerous different editions preserved, was Mirzā Ebrāhim b. Mohammad-Bāqer Jouhari's *Tufān al-bokā'* (The Deluge of Tears). This book, whose author died in 1253 AH/1837 AD, was completed in 1250 AH/1834 AD and was

published in probably more than 50 editions during the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] The lithographed editions of the genre were, however, more than presentations of literary (and often rhymed) versions of the early days of Islam and of the pivotal Shi'i experience of the martyrdom of Hoseyn and his followers at Karbala. What made the lithographed editions so special was that their text was often accompanied by illustrations. In this manner, they were able to contribute to the popularisation of quintessential Shi'i concepts, while also drawing on popular imagery and furthering the stereotypical representation of themes lying at the core of Shi'i self-definition.

It is these illustrations that I propose to discuss. In approaching the topic, a few words will have to suffice to introduce the specific Qajar phenomenon of lithographed books. The theoretical grounding of my presentation is developed against the backdrop of the general iconography of narrative themes in Persian art. In empirically relying on a comprehensive survey of illustrations contained in lithographed books of the Qajar period,[4] I will focus on two kinds of illustrations dealing with Shi'i themes. On the one hand, there are scenes whose overall iconographical value is immediately recognisable by anyone with even a basic knowledge of Shi'i concepts; on the other, a substantial amount of illustrations occurs with a certain frequency in different books. The items of the latter category serve best to demonstrate the iconographical potential of Shi'i themes in lithographic illustrations, as their adequate interpretation is linked to a more subtle, and sometimes intrinsic, knowledge of the related events.[5]

Lithographed books of the Qajar period

The particular art form of narrative illustration in Persian lithographed books is germane to the Qajar period. The technique of printing by way of lithography had been invented only just before the end of the eighteenth century, at a time when printing in general had not become a common practice in Iran. In fact, printing books from movable type was introduced to Iran only in the days of ʿAbbās Mirzā, Fath ʿAli Shāh's heir apparent (who, in the end, was outlived by his father). Until Fath ʿAli Shāh's death, about 30 books had been printed by way of the newly introduced technique of printing from movable type. This technique had contributed tremendously to the availability and spread of knowledge in the West. In Iran, however, printing from movable type never gained a strong currency. Several reasons account for this lack of success, most decisive of which was probably the strong aesthetic sentiment of Iranian readers, who would not accept the physical appearance of texts in printed books. In particular, the printing types

used were regarded as crude in comparison to the accomplished practice of calligraphy, which has maintained its position as a highly esteemed cultural practice until the present day. Considering this situation, in the historical perspective, it appears as a particularly fortunate coincidence that printing by way of lithography had been invented shortly before. Moreover, lithography was introduced to Iran at the very moment when those in power became aware of the various advantages of printing books. In contrast to printing from movable type, lithography not only guaranteed the smooth continuation of calligraphy, as lithographed books virtually correspond to facsimile printings of manuscripts, but also permitted the integration of both illumination and illustration in one and the same process of printing, thus enabling Iranian publishers to create the specific form of illustrated lithographed books. While the first lithographed book in Iran was published in 1248–9 AH/1832–3 AD, the first illustrated lithographed books were not published until several years later, an early specimen being the 1259 AH/1843 AD edition of Maktabi's *Leyli va Majnun*. Even though the latter date marks the beginning of a period in which printing from movable type experienced a certain revival (after a hiatus of about a decade), lithographic printing soon gained the upper hand. Besides the appeal of lithographed calligraphy, the illustrations published in lithographed books certainly contributed to the success of this way of printing in Iran.

Illustrated books included cosmographical and zoographical encyclopaedias; works of theology, history, medicine and astronomy; as well as books on military drill, travel and education. Meanwhile, the majority of illustrations in lithographed books of the Qajar period is encountered in works pertaining to narrative literature, whether historical or fictional in terms of themes, and whether classical or contemporary Qajar in terms of language. The stories contained in narrative works often serve to illustrate specific moral or edifying points, and many episodes would readily offer themselves for pictorial rendering. Illustrations to episodes with an exemplary character could even gain a life of their own that would transcend their original function and turn them into icons in their own right.

Exemplary illustrations of historical and religious themes

The best studied of the exemplary illustrations of historical and religious themes is probably the depiction of Bahrām-Gur and his slave girl, often known as Āzāde, who had challenged him to hit both the foot and the ear of an onager with a single arrow.[6] The related episode is contained in both Ferdousi's *Shāhnāmeh* and Nezāmi's *Khamse* and is also rendered in

lithographed editions of the two works (Figures 8a and 8b).[7] Other images from the field of historical narrative offering easy and unambiguous identification include many of the standard scenes from the Persian classics, such as, to name but a few, 'Farhād hewing away at Mount Bisotun' (Figure 9), 'Leyli and Majnun' (Figure 10), and 'the great wall built by Alexander' (Figure 11). One of the few images outside this range of narratives with a similar iconographical value is the one depicting the so-called *doval-pā*, known in English as the 'old man of the sea', a strap-legged monstrous creature of Persian legend that figures prominently in the narratives of Sindbād in the *Thousand and One Nights* and in similar stories, such as the travel adventures of the jeweller Salim (Figures 12a and 12b).

Above all, many of the scenes in which Rostam, the quintessential hero of Iranian history, makes his appearance have gained a strong iconographical value. And here again, the scene of Rostam killing the White Div (Figure 13) with its convincing dichotomy of good vanquishing evil and its presence in various forms of art is probably one of the best known. In the later episodes of the *Shāhnāmeh*, Rostam, by way of his armour, and particularly his helmet (Figure 14), is one of the few historical characters who are unambiguously identifiable in terms of iconography – besides such characters as Zahhāk, who is clearly characterised by the two snakes growing from his shoulders



Figure 8a Bahrām-Gur and Āzāde: *Shāhnāme* (1264).



Figure 8b Bahrām-Gur and Āzāde: *Khamse* (1264).



Figure 9 Farhād hewing away at Mount Bisotun: *Khamse* (1264).



Figure 10 Leili and Majnun: *Khamse* (1264).

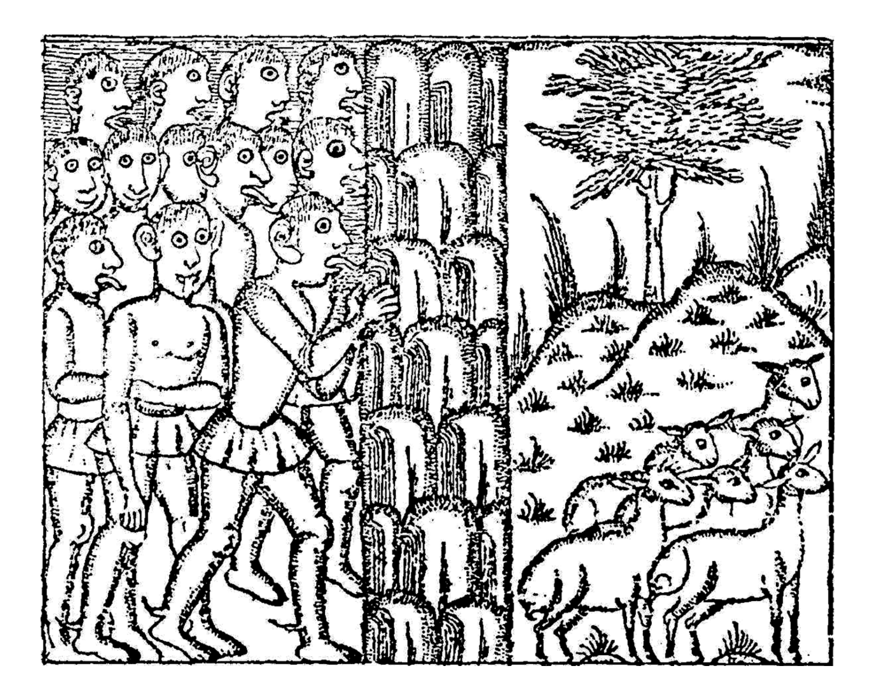


Figure 11 The great wall built by Alexander: *Khamse* (1264).



Figure 12a The *Doval-pā: Hezār-o yek shab* (1272).



Figure 12b The *Doval-pā: Salim-e Javāheri* (1271).

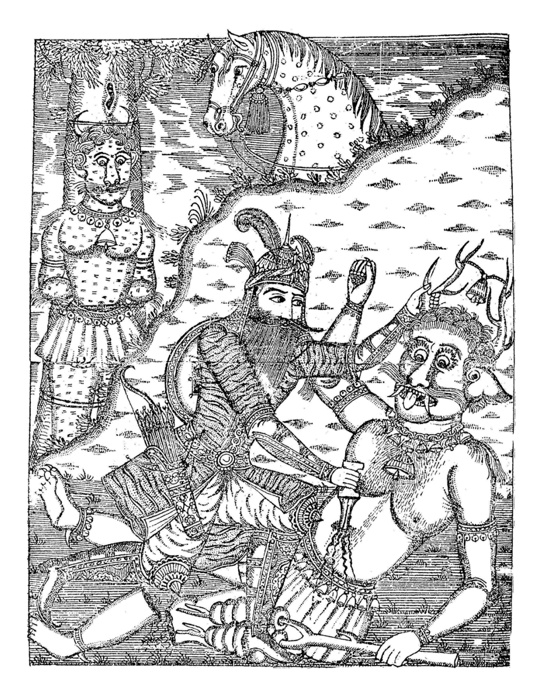


Figure 13 Rostam kills the White Div: *Shāhnāme* (1265–67).

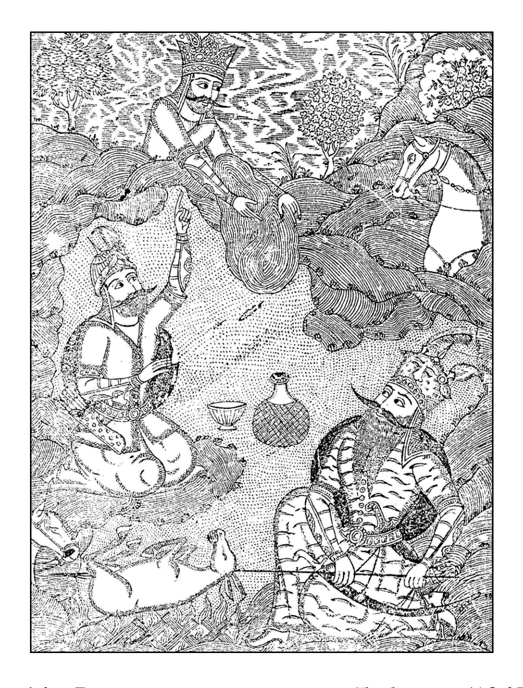


Figure 14 Rostam roasts an onager: *Shāhnāme* (1265–67).

(Figure 15). Notably, besides Rostam as the embodiment of Iranian national values, there is only one other character, as we shall presently see, who by way of his iconography has gained a similarly unambiguous prominence: Ali, the quintessential religious hero and the embodiment of Shi'i religious values.[8]

In the area of religious themes, whether pre-Islamic or early Islamic, the amount of images having gained an iconographical value similar to that of historical images is comparatively small. As for pre-Islamic religious history, the most prominent ones occurring in a variety of works are 'Abraham about to sacrifice his son' (Figures 16a and 16b) and 'Solomon enthroned' (Figure 17). Besides the eschatological figure of the Dajjāl (Figure 18), the only exclusively Islamic, while not predominantly Shi'i, theme recurrently depicted is one of the Prophet Mohammad's miracles, the 'splitting of the moon' (*shaqq al-qamar*) (Figure 19). But early Islamic history is already tantamount to early Shi'i history, so it is here that the pictorial depiction of Shi'i themes begins.

Shi'i themes in Persian literature

Shi'i identity, both learned and popular, is determined by two main points. The first point is the unquestionable superiority of Ali. Islamic dogma

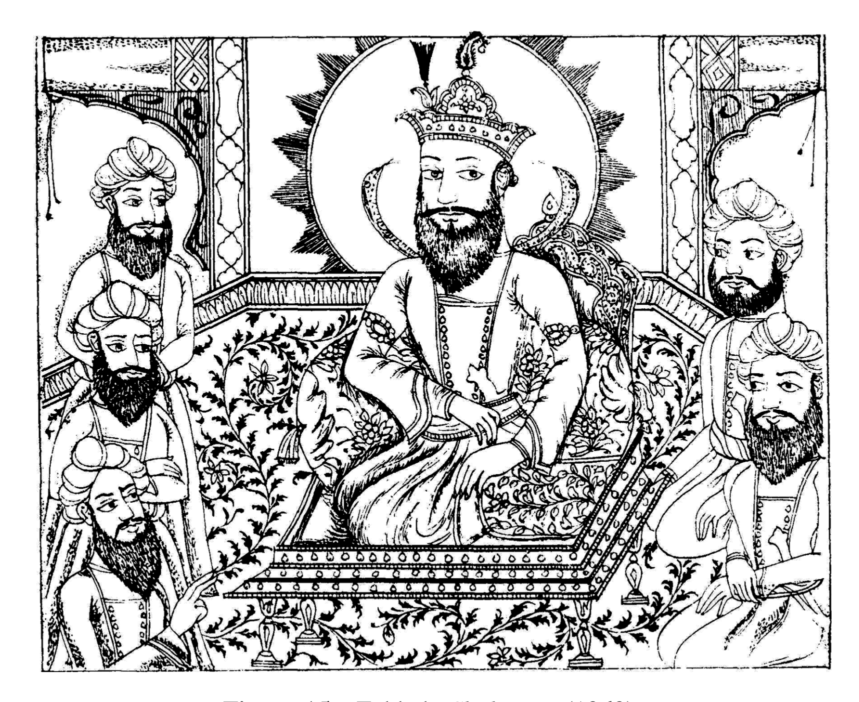


Figure 15 Zahhāk: *Shāhnāme* (1262).

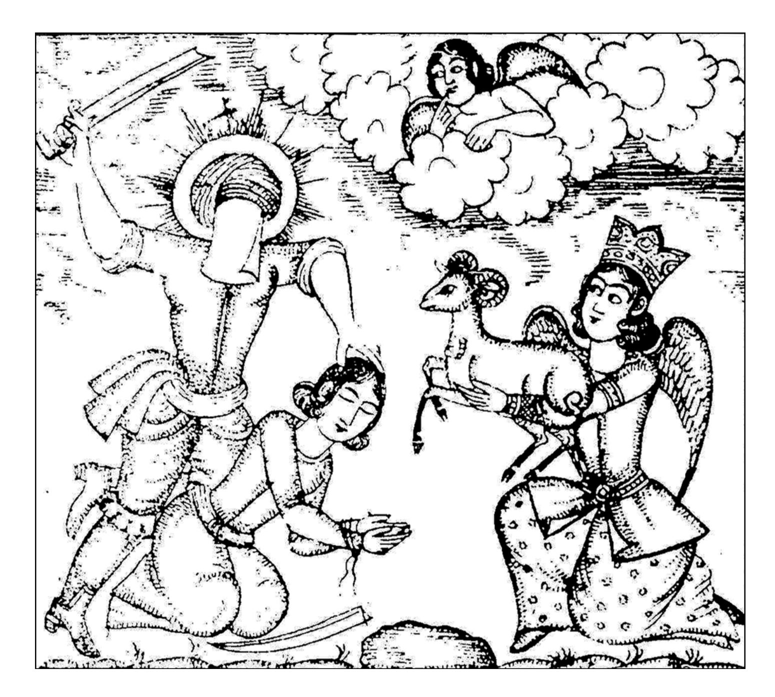


Figure 16a Abraham about to sacrifice his son: *Akhbār-nāme* (1267).



Figure 16b Abraham about to sacrifice his son: *Hezār mas'ale* (s.a.).



Figure 17 Solomon enthroned: *‘Ajā’eb al-makhluqāt* (1264).

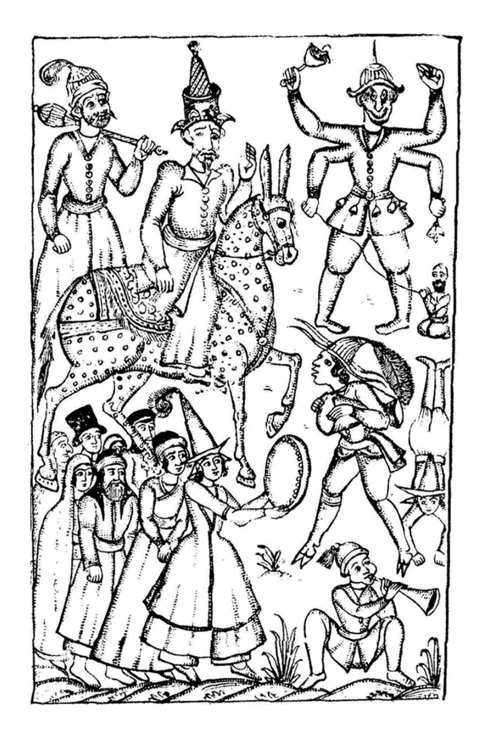


Figure 18 The *Dajjāl: ‘Aqā’ed al-shi‘a* (1269).



Figure 19 The Prophet Mohammad's miracle of 'Splitting of the Moon' *(shaqq al-qamar): Akhbār-nāme* (1267).

reserves the pride of first place to the Prophet Mohammad, but Shi'i popular veneration for Ali surpasses the Prophet's position by far. He is the only legitimate successor to the Prophet Mohammad as the leader of the Islamic community, the *umma*. He is the first imam of the Shi'a, whose denomination, after all, derives from the essential qualification as the *shi'at Ali*, the 'party of Ali'. He is, in short, the supreme human being. In terms of narrative literature, this point is elaborated in numerous books that treat Ali's historical exploits in the early period of the spread of Islam, many of which have in subsequent centuries been embellished with fictional events up to the point that Ali – similar to the heroes of the Persian popular romances – is even made to fight *div*s and dragons.[9] The most popular of these books in the Qajar period probably was Moulā Bamun-Ali's *Hamle-ye Heydariyeh* (The Lion's Attack), the term *heydar*, or lion, being one of Ali's epithets (Figure 20).

The second point determining Shi'i identity is the tragic experience of Hoseyn's martyrdom at Karbala (Figure 21). This event is elaborated in an even larger quantity of books compiled in both poetry and prose. Besides the *Tufān al-bokā'*, already mentioned, and Sarbāz Borujerdi's similarly popular *Asrār al-shahāda* (The Secrets of Martyrdom), this category of books comprises items such as Mollā Hasan Hā'eri's *Anvār al-shahāda* (The

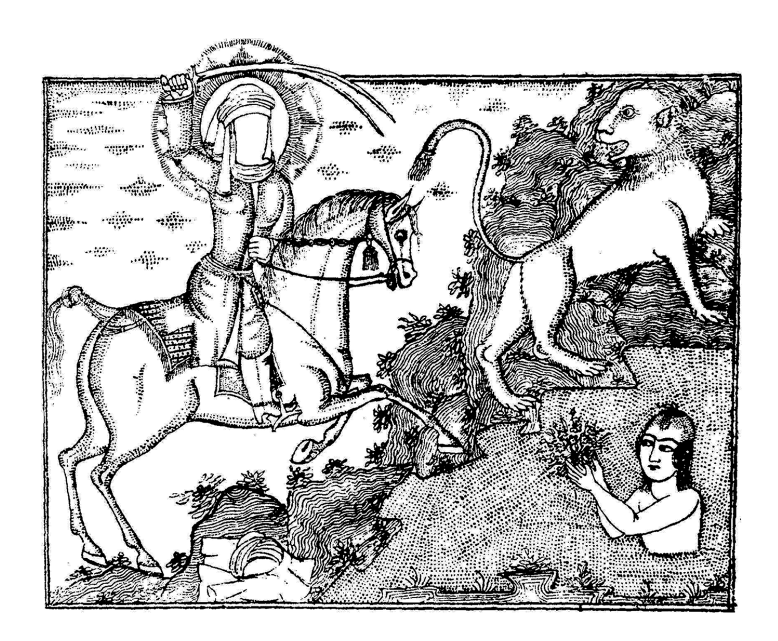


Figure 20 Ali attacking a lion: *Hamle-ye Heidariye* (1264).

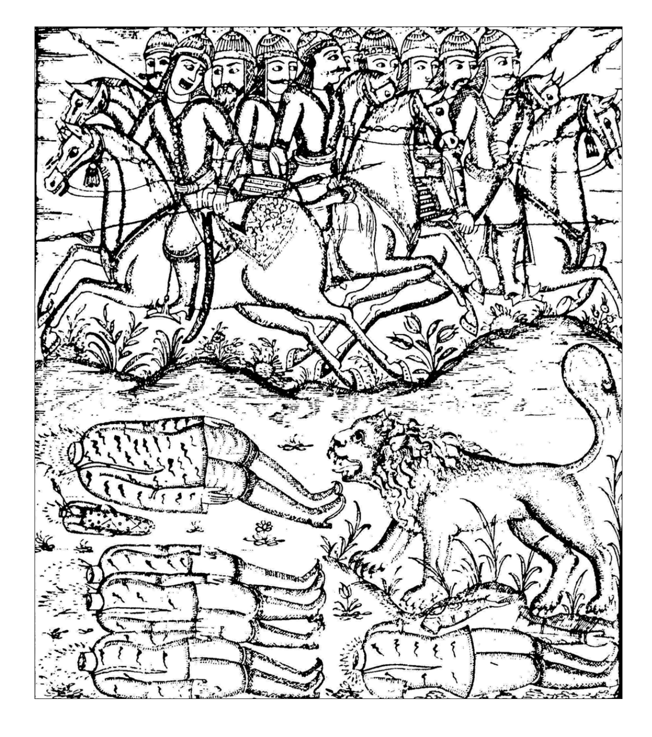


Figure 21 A lion defends the beheaded bodies of the martyrs of Karbala: *Mātamkade* (1266).

Lights of Martyrdom), Āqā Mirzā ʿAmmān Sāmāni's *Ganjine-ye asrār* (The Treasury of Secrets), Bidel's *Mātamkade* (The House of Mourning), Bidel Kermānshāhāni's *Tohfat al-Zākerin* (The Gift of Those Who Remember), Mohammad-Hoseyn b. Mohammad-Rezā's *Vasilat al-najāt* (The Means of Deliverance) and many more.

The iconography of Shi'i themes in lithographic illustration

In accordance with the two previously mentioned points determining Shi'i consciousness, there are two areas of Shi'i iconography in lithographed books of the Qajar period. The first relates to Ali and his role in early Islamic history, and the second to the last days of Hoseyn and his followers, culminating in the battle of Karbala. Illustrations to subsequent Shi'i history focus on the aftermath of Karbala, such as the revenge taken by Mokhtār. Illustrations to topics unrelated to those tragic events are extremely rare. In fact, the only images related to the later Shi'i imams are contained in the 1267 edition of the *Akhbār-nāme,* a booklet of the genre of *qesas al-anbeyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), whose historical range covers the events from the creation of Adam to the Day of Judgement.[10] While just less than a quarter of the booklet's 82 text-related illustrations deal with Shi'i history, the Shi'i imams after Hoseyn are only depicted with one illustration each.

The majority of illustrations related to Shi'i themes in lithographed books of the Qajar period, in accordance with the related events, deal with battles and fights. Early Islamic and, particularly, early Shi'i history is depicted as a period of constant warfare, armed strife, and struggle for the recognition of legitimate rule. In the early days of Islam, the battles served to spread the True Faith to the infidels, and Ali is depicted as the impeccable and valiant hero, the Prophet's first and most faithful follower and the religion's most ardent defender. Many of the illustrations relating to religious warfare are fairly unspecific, depicting heroes in single combat or armies either preparing to fight or fighting each other. In a like manner, they might also be, and often are, contained in any book treating armed strife, such as Ferdousi's *Shāhnāmeh*, or one of the Persian popular romances, such as *Eskandarnāmeh* or *Romuz-e Hamze* (Figures 22a and 22b). Often the only iconographical clue enabling the viewer to distinguish a religious context from a historical one is the fact that the hero's face is covered by a veil or is surrounded by a halo. There is, however, a certain group of images that has gained a specific iconography in depicting crucial events.

In terms of chronology of the historical events, the first Shi'i image with a clear iconography is an illustration to the legend about the infant Ali's

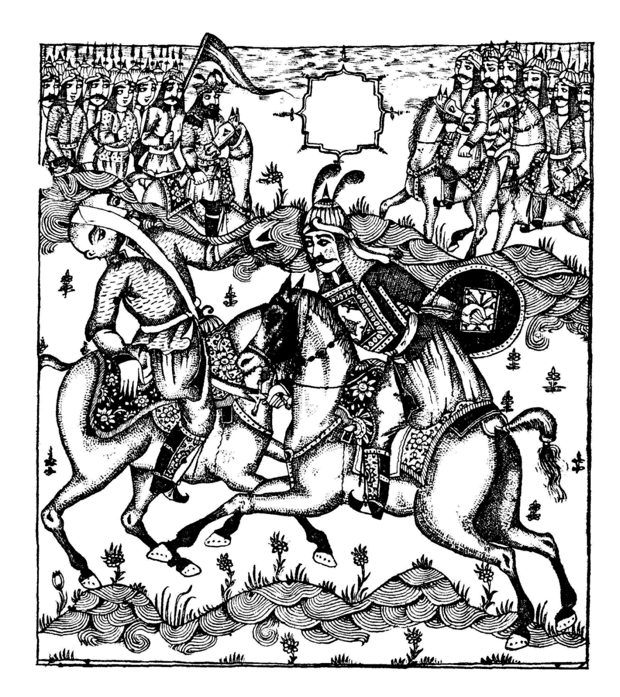


Figure 22a Battle scene in profane narrative: *Romuz-e Hamze* (1273–76).

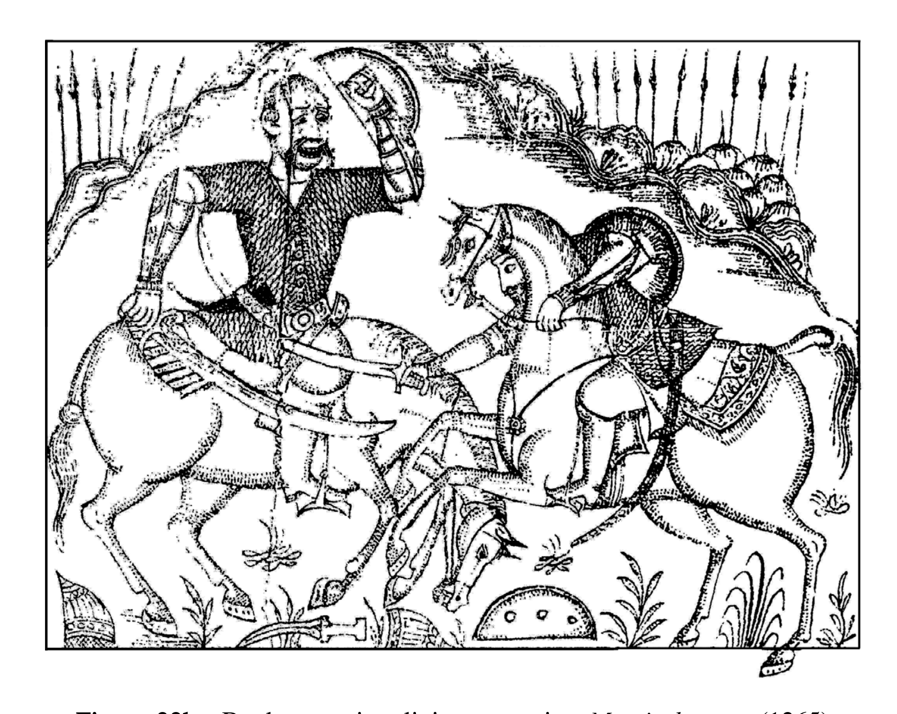


Figure 22b Battle scene in religious narrative: *Moseiyab-nāme* (1265).

fight with a dragon (Figure 23). The story goes that a dragon attacked Ali in his cradle. Ali showed superhuman awareness and strength in seizing the dragon's jaws and ripping the monster apart. One of the interesting points in this image is the fact that items of material culture, such as the infant's cradle, are depicted according to usage contemporary with the illustrator's work. It is for this reason that illustrations in Qajar lithographed books constitute an important source for studying the cultural and social history of the period.[11]

The depiction of Ali

From the Shi'i point of view, not only was Ali the most deserving character to lead the Islamic community after the Prophet Mohammad's death, but he had also been explicitly appointed by Mohammad as his successor. This event is said to have taken place when the party rested during the return from the Prophet's final pilgrimage at a pond between Mecca and Medina known as Ghadir-e Khomm, when Mohammad took Ali's hand and said, '*Man kuntu maulāhu fa-Ali maulāhu*' (Everybody whose patron I am also has Ali as a patron). The scene is thus of pivotal importance for Shi'i self-definition (Figure 24). While the faces of the two venerated characters are veiled, Mohammad is depicted on the right

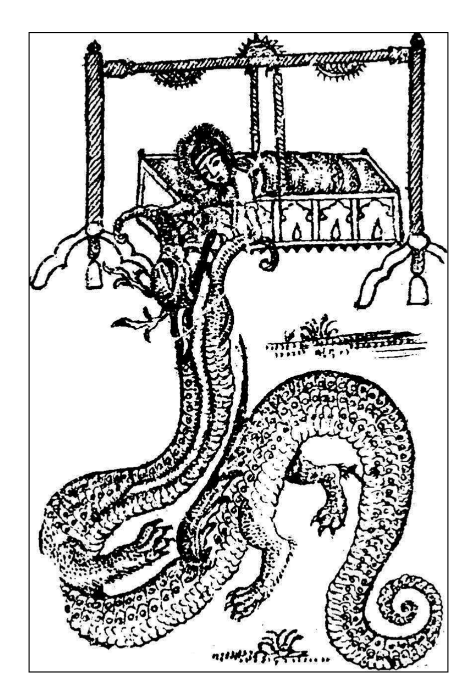


Figure 23 The infant Ali fighting a dragon: *Daftar* (untitled booklet) (1263).

side of the image, seated on a stack of camel saddles, while Ali is placed in the centre. With his right hand Mohammad holds up Ali's left hand, and with his left hand points to him in a gesture of acknowledgement. A crowd of followers sitting nearby watches the scene, indicating both the official nature of Mohammad's gesture and the fact that the witnesses will later be cited in testimony of Ali's designation (*nass*) as Mohammad's successor.

Ali's prowess in battle is most impressively demonstrated at the battle of Kheybar, where, in an often reproduced image, he vanquished the enemy champion Marhab (Figure 25). Ali's stroke with his famous sword Zolfaqār is said to have been so fierce that the archangels Esrāfil, Gabriel and Michael descended to earth, two of them guiding Ali's hand and one of them protecting the earth with his wings, lest it be split in two, as was the enemy's body.

Ali's sanctity is underlined by several miracles he is said to have performed, at least two of them emulating miracles of the pre-Islamic prophets. Ali's staff turning into a dragon emulates the story of Moses (Musā) (Figure 26), while his fire ordeal relates to that of Abraham (Ebrāhim) (Figure 27). The motif that fire or great heat does not harm the hero belongs

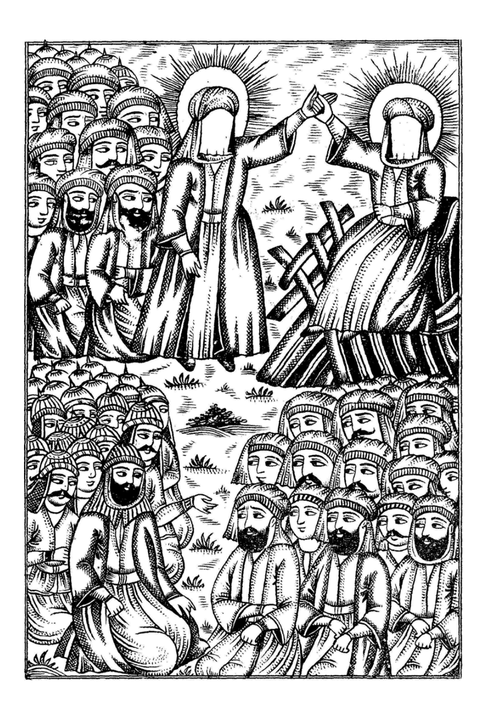


Figure 24 Ali and Muhammad at Ghadir-e Khomm: *Eftekhār-nāme-ye Heidari* (1310).



Figure 25 Ali fights Marhab-e Kheibari: *Eftekhār-nāme-ye Heidari* (1310).

to the standard repertoire of legend, whether historical or religious. In the Iranian national legend, it is impressively demonstrated by the fire ordeal of Siyāvosh in Ferdousi's *Shāhnāmeh*. Ali, rather than passing through the fire without harm, is seated on the fire, whose flames, instead of harming him, turn into roses.

Fātemeh, the Prophet Mohammad's daughter, is the most venerated woman in Shi'i Islam and, in fact, one of the few female characters depicted with an active role in lithographic illustration. Her marriage to Ali (Figure 28) serves as a further argument to legitimise the claim of his sons to succeed him as the leaders of the Islamic community, as they are both the Prophet's only living male offspring (albeit in the second generation) and the descendants of the person most venerated by Shi'i Islam.

Ali was assassinated at the hand of a certain ʿAbdarrahmān b. Muljam. Historical sources sometimes relate the attack as having taken place at the door of a mosque in Kufa. The illustrations, however, depict Ali deeply immersed in prayer, the attack of his assailant thus constituting a foul and cowardly act that deprived the Islamic community of its legitimate ruler (Figure 29).

It is significant to note that Ali is the only religious character who can be identified by way of an unambiguous iconographical detail. Historically,



Figure 26 Ali's staff turns into a dragon: *Akhbār-nāme* (1267).



Figure 27 Ali's fire ordeal: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).



Figure 28 Fātima preparing for her wedding: *Jāme' al-mo'jezāt* (1271).



Figure 29 The assassination of Ali: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).

Ali's sword Zolfaqār – as is known from a description dating back to Fatimid times – had two cutting edges (Arabic *shafratān*), on both the upper and the lower side. Popular iconography has turned this into a sword whose blade branches into two separate tips.[12] Even though Ali's son Hoseyn is said to have inherited Ali's sword, in popular iconography the depiction of a hero handling a sword with two tips is restricted to Ali. As already mentioned, it is interesting to note that Ali, as the quintessential religious hero, shares this basic iconographical depiction only with Rostam, the ultimate national hero, who is identified by way of his helmet.

The battle at Karbala and its aftermath

While Ali is being venerated as the supreme human being, his son Hoseyn, the third Shi'i imam, is most ardently venerated because of his tragic death. In fact, the martyrdom of Hoseyn, his family and his followers during the battle of Karbala in Moharram 60 AH/October 680 AD is the pivotal tragedy of Shi'ism. The chain of events taking place before and on the crucial date of 10 Moharram, the day of *'Āshurā'*, has been remembered, recounted and re-enacted innumerable times. Whereas the tragedy consists of numerous single events, the large majority of which are well known to the Shi'i community, some scenes are particularly notorious for their tragic impact. It is hard to judge which of those scenes is either most tragic or best known.

The scene that is most often depicted in various books and also most unambiguously identifiable in terms of iconography shows Hoseyn together with his infant son Ali-Asghar (Figure 30). Hoseyn, his face covered by a veil, is seated on horseback, holding his son in his arm with the other arm sometimes clutching a spear. Besides being small, the infant is depicted as tightly wrapped, thus demonstrating his absolute helplessness. The image invokes the memory of Hoseyn's destitution when he implored the merciless enemy to let at least his infant son drink some water. As one of the most moving images relating to Karbala, the devotional image has also been reproduced as a single-leaf print that was probably distributed or sold at the Shi'i centres of pilgrimage in Iraq (Figure 31).[13]

In the framework of the many fights and related cruelties during the battle of Karbala, it is at times hard to identify the acting characters, but two of them stand out for their iconography: Qāsem, the son of Hasan, Hoseyn's brother, who is usually depicted as a shining youth whose face is surrounded by a halo (Figure 32); and Abo 'l-Fazl ʿAbbās, Hoseyn's half brother (Figure 33), whose face is rendered as that of a beautiful bearded man of age. Notably, some of the minor scenes connected with the battle of Karbala are rendered in great detail. However, the images allow an unambiguous

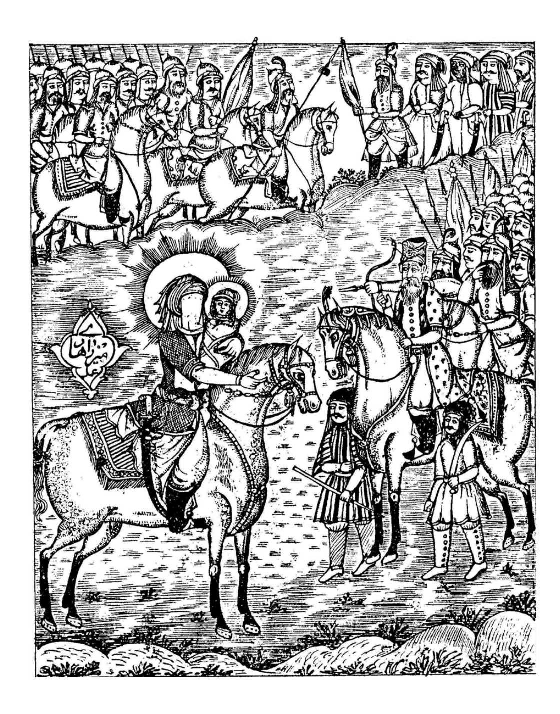


Figure 30 Hoseyn and Ali-Asghar: *Vasilat al-najāt* (1284).



Figure 31 Hoseyn and Ali-Asghar: Single-leaf print (1313).

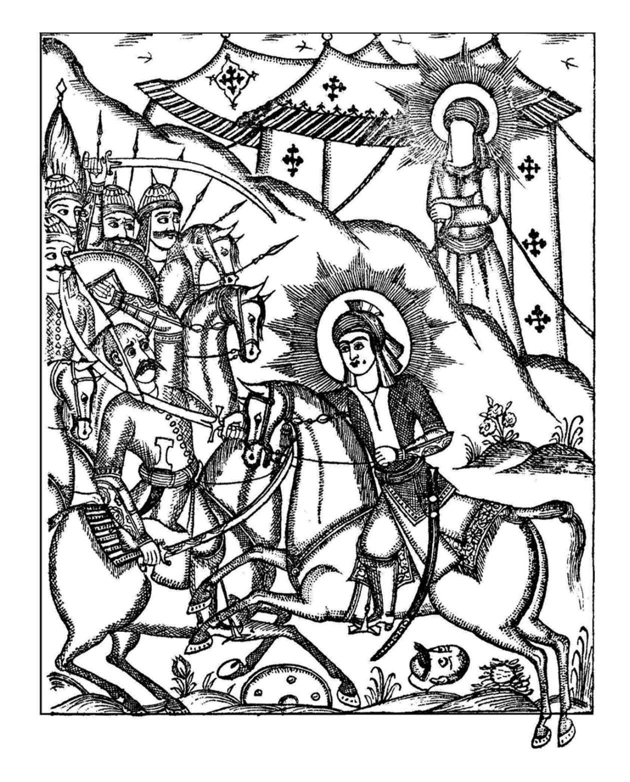


Figure 32 Qāsem: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).

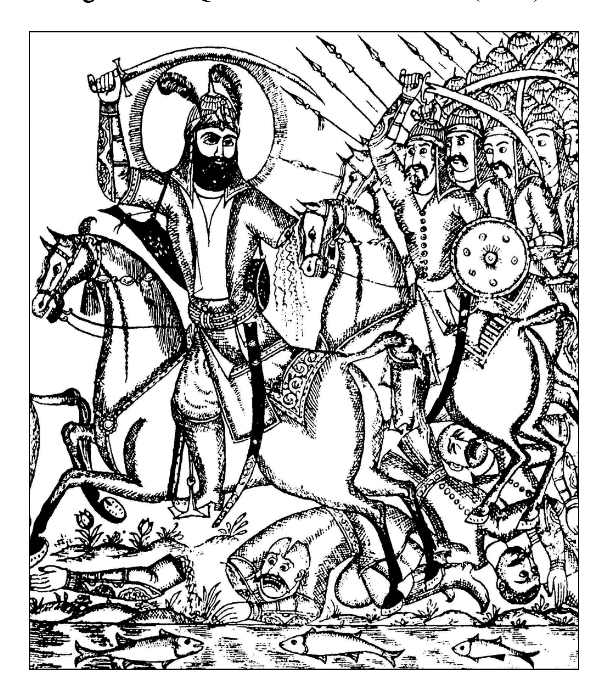


Figure 33 Abo 'l-Fazl ʿAbbās: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).

identification only for the initiated viewers who are familiar with the many episodes related in the sources. There is, for instance, the scene of a warrior on foot attacking a group of enemies before the background of a city wall. Against the backdrop of Karbala, this scene would depict Moslem b. ʿAqil attacking the inhabitants of Kufa, a battle during which Moslem was killed (Figure 34). A similarly clear identification is permitted for the scene in which the two children whom Moslem left without protection have been sought out and are about to be murdered by Hāres (Figure 35). Another minor event, Vahb's mother assisting her son's party by attacking the enemies with a tent-pole (Figure 36), also allows an unambiguous identification as a similar event is not depicted in any other context.

Probably the most shocking scene to a Shi'i audience is the one following Hoseyn's murder at the hand of Shemr, whose evil character is usually underlined by his depiction with boar's teeth (Figure 37). Having severed Hoseyn's head, the Caliph Muʿāwiya's troops paraded it on top of a spear when heading back to Damascus (Figure 38).

As for the events following the aftermath of Karbala, the scene that is most often depicted is the cruel revenge that the Shi'i insurgent Mokhtār

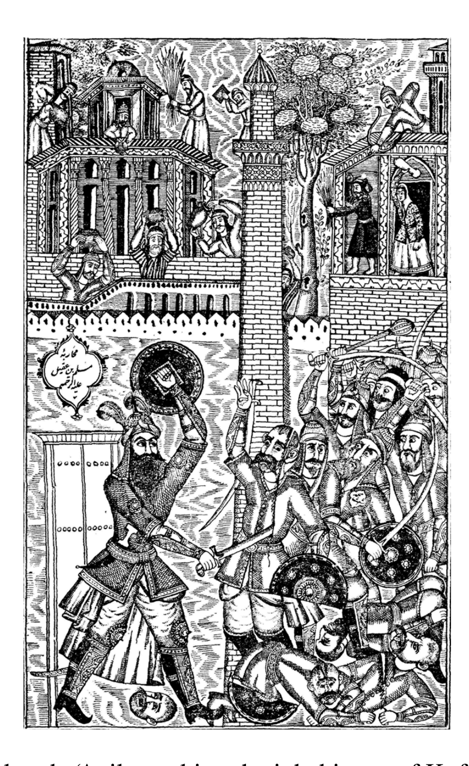


Figure 34 Moslem b. ʻAqil attacking the inhabitants of Kufa: *Tufān al-bokā'* (1269).

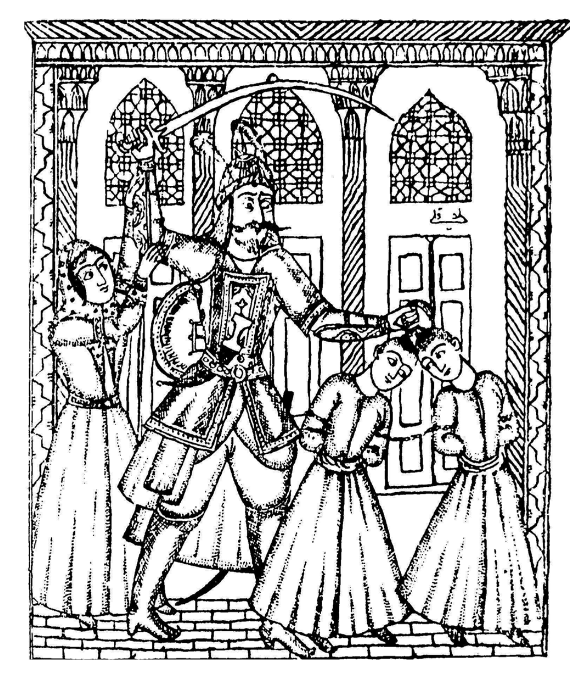


Figure 35 Hāres about to murder Moslem's children: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).



Figure 36 Vahb's mother attacking the enemies with a tent-pole: *Tufān al-bokā*' (s.a.).

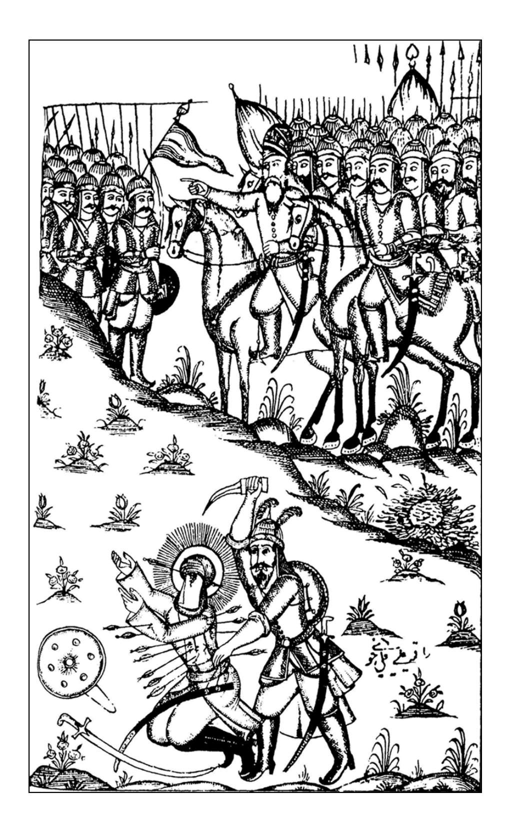


Figure 37 Shemr about to murder Hoseyn: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).

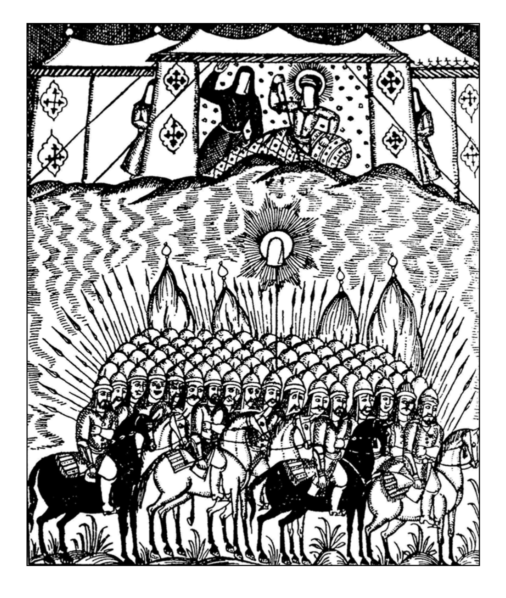


Figure 38 Mu'āwiya's troops parading Hoseyn's severed head: *Asrār al-shahāda* (1268).

took on those inhabitants of Kufa who were held responsible for Hoseyn's tragic death at Karbala. The revenge is depicted as a series of mutilations and tortures of utmost brutality inflicted upon those deemed guilty, with Mokhtār presiding over the action but not actively taking part (Figure 39).

Concluding remarks

The iconography of Shi'i themes relates to the basic tenets of the Shi'i creed. To the uninitiated Westerner, many scenes might look alike to such a degree that they are deemed almost identical. To Shi'i Muslims themselves, and particularly to those who actively practise their creed, they are easily identifiable as pictorial renderings of the central characters and pivotal events that lie at the core of Shi'i self-definition. The iconography of these Shi'i themes does, of course, result from the events discussed in the related texts. As a rule, the illustrations would not depict any events not described in the text. At the same time, any illustrative programme is but a reduction of the related narrative, whether only selected narratives out of many have been chosen for depiction, or whether a complex event is being condensed into the nutshell of a single image. The focus on iconographical

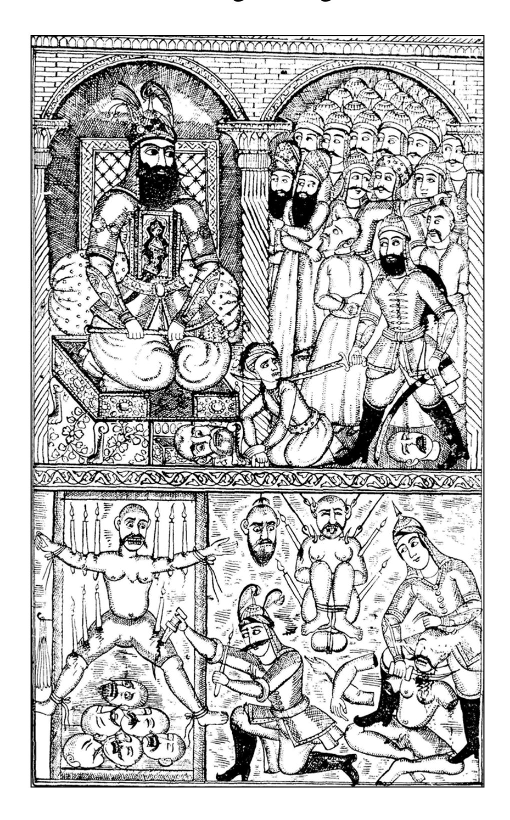


Figure 39 Mokhtār taking revenge: *Tufān al-bokā'* (1272).

representation adds a further reduction to essential and unambiguously identifiable details transporting a clear notion within the image of a single item, thereby transforming this item into an icon. Summing up the present discussion, it appears as though two items in particular offer themselves as icons of Shi'i identity: Ali's sword Zolfaqār as the epitomised symbol of the constant Shi'i struggle for the recognition of legitimate rule in the Islamic world, and Hoseyn's severed head as a powerful reminder of the historical tragedy that followed when Shi'i responsibilities were neglected.

The Shi'i themes discussed here are not necessarily germane to lithographic illustration, as many of them have also been illustrated in previous manuscript tradition, such as the famous *Khāvarānnāmeh*.[14] Meanwhile, their publication in lithographed books not only marks a change in technique, but, moreover, one in audience. Lithographed books, even though still quite expensive for whatever one might consider the average reader in the Qajar period, were available to larger audiences than any reading matter previously produced in Iran. In this manner, the illustrations contained in lithographed books of the Qajar period held the potential to contribute to standardising and propagating the depiction of Shi'i themes in a previously unprecedented manner. In addition, there is a complex relationship between lithographic illustration and the depiction of Shi'i themes in various other areas of art, such as lacquerwork, picture tiles, stuccowork, paintings on walls (murals) or behind glass, and picture carpets,[15] all of which at times employ specifically Shi'i imagery and serve to remind the Shi'i community of the basic tenets of its creed.

Notes

1. Chelkowski 1979; Aghaie 2004.
2. Marzolph 2002b; idem 2007.
3. Marzolph 2001, pp. 266–267.
4. Marzolph 2001.
5. For important works on Persian and Islamic iconography, see Fontana 1994; Milstein, Rührdanz and Schmitz 1999; Sims, Marshak and Grube 2002.
6. Fontana 1986; Marzolph 1999.
7. For bibliographical details of the works mentioned in the following, see Marzolph 2001.
8. Soroudi 1980.
9. Vakiliyān and Sālehi 1380/2001.
10. Marzolph 2002a.
11. Āqāpur 1377/1998.
12. Halm 1996.
13. Vinchon 1925.

14. Ibn Hisām Khusefi Birjandi 1381/2002.
15. Seif 1369/1990; idem 1371/1992; idem 1376/1997; idem 1379/2000; Tanāvoli 1368/1999.

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The Lion of Ali in Anatolia: History, Symbolism and Iconology

Thierry Zarcone

Introduction

THE LION IS A UNIVERSAL SYMBOL widespread in almost all the religious and cultural traditions of prehistoric Europe and Asia.[1] It has also occupied a major place in antiquity and in the Judaeo-Christian religions. Hence, it was influential on Islam through the Byzantines and particularly on Anatolia, a place that was the home of several mystery religions and other Hellenistic cults. But the influence has also worked in the opposite direction, that is, from Islam to Christianity, for the Muslim lion was later borrowed by mediaeval European heraldry and textiles patterns.[2] In general, the symbol of the lion in Islamic Anatolia results from the encountering, and, in some cases, the mixing, of three religious and cultural traditions that are quite different from each other. In the first of these traditions whose geographical origin is Central Asia and, religiously speaking, pre-Islamic Asia, the lion (*bars*, *tonga*, *arslan*)[3] is a symbol of strength and power. Consequently, it was integrated into many patronymics of kings, sovereigns and tribal chieftains of the Turkic area: Tonga Tegin (Prince-Lion), Alp Er Tonga (Courageous-Man-Lion), Arslan Bey (Lord-Lion) and Kızıl Arslan (Red-Lion). In addition, the names of certain Central Asian Sufis refer to the lion; for example, Arslan Baba (the Father-Lion).[4] In the second of these traditions, the lion (*esed*, *şir*) is integrated into the motif of a man riding on a lion with a snake whip in his hand. This motif has Tibetan-Buddhist and Hindu origins, but it travelled over India, Central Asia and Iran during the course of centuries and was then adopted by many other religions and spiritual trends: Islam, Shamanism, Sufism and even Christianity.[5] The third tradition is Shi'ism,

which recognises the lion as an attribute of Imam Ali. Although the lion in these three traditions mingled in the Anatolian crucible, its pristine origins are easily recognisable to the eyes of the historian and the anthropologist. Herein, it is only to the third tradition – that of Ali as a lion in Anatolian Shi'ism and Sufism – that I want to draw attention.

One of the first encounters between the Turkic and the Shi'i lions is exemplified in the legend of Satuk Buğra Han, the first Turkish sovereign who converted to Islam, in Eastern Turkistan in the eleventh century, for his daughter was mated with a lion and gave birth to a son named Ali Arslan Han, Ali the King-Lion.[6] Three centuries later, in Anatolia, the figure of the lion was particularly represented in the writing and arts of several crypto-Shi'i movements, especially in the Bektashi Sufi orders and in other Sufi or mystical lineages close to them, such as the Mevleviye and the Hurufiye. The lion was also well represented among the nomads, particularly in the form of funerary statues, which are surprisingly similar to those existing among Iranian nomads.[7] Needless to say, Shi'i ideas spread among the Anatolian Turkish tribes, particularly after the Safavid period (the sixteenth century) and left their imprint on the whole of the region, even on the Sunnis.[8]

I will underpin my brief analysis of the figure of the lion in Anatolia by focusing on two specific points, both interrelated, of these crypto-Shi'i movements: firstly, the interpretation of the lion in the poetry and ceremonial of the Bektashi and Alevi movements, and in general in Anatolian Sufism; and, secondly, the lion's representation in sacred art, especially in Bektashi-Alevi calligraphy and sculpture.

The lion of Ali in Bektashi-Alevi doctrine and ceremonial

In Bektashi-Alevi doctrine the major legend about the role played by the lion as a symbol of Ali takes place during the famous night of the *mirac* (*meraj*), when the Prophet Mohammad made his famous ascent to the heavens. There are many versions of this story; one of them is a poem attributed to Hatai, the pen name of the Persian king Shah Ismail Safavi (d. 1524). This poem, called *miracname*,[9] was collected by the Turkish scholar Yusuf Ziya (Yörükān) in 1928.[10]

According to this poem, Mohammad, on his way to the ascent, met a lion (*arslan*) at the door of a dervish lodge (*dergāh*) who threatened him. However, he was told by God that the lion simply wanted a sign (*nişān*) from him. So, Mohammad gave him his seal (*hatm*) and was free to pass. Then Mohammad reached the heavens and performed the circumambulation

(*tavaf*) around God. He complained that this ferocious lion tormented him and wanted to devour the poor dervishes. Finally, Mohammad was told that this lion is Ali, and that this animal is the 'lion of power' (*şir-i devlet*) and the servant of the Prophet. Selman (Farisi) was also present with Ali and both were given a bunch of grapes. Having learnt the 91 secrets from God, Mohammad went to the lodge of the Forty (*Kırklar dergâhı*). Selman, who was one of these Forty, brought the grapes to this assembly; the grapes were squeezed by an invisible hand and the whole of the Forty were intoxicated by the juice issuing from these grapes. Then everybody, Mohammad included, started dancing (*sema*) and singing the name of God (*Hüvellah Allah*) and *lā ilahe illallah*. This is one of the legends that explain the dances practised by the Bektashi and the Alevi up to the present day. At the end, Ali came and put the seal of the Prophet in the middle of the assembly. Thus, the Prophet understood that Ali was the lion he met at the entrance of the *dergāh* and, consequently, the 'secret of the secret of Allah', the 'beginning and the end, the outward and the inward'.

From a contemporary Alevi guidebook used in the village of Sarılar (in the district of Gaziantep in south-eastern Turkey), we do know that this *miracname* was read during Alevi ritual meetings, actually during the meeting of the Forty. Then, following its reading, all the participants start dancing (*sema*).[11] That is to say that the Alevi ritual here reproduces the events told by the *miracname*. A particular dance called *miraclama* performed by Alevis living in the district of Zile (in the province of Tokat in Central Anatolia) is based on Hatai's *miracname*, which is sung by a bard playing a *saz*. The text of this *miracname*, collected by a Turkish researcher, is identical to that of Yusuf Ziya's.[12]

There are several poems by Bektashi authors, usually sung during the assemblies, that allude to the legend transmitted by the *miracname* and to the lion of Ali:[13]

> Mohammad entered the way of ascent
> This secret was a secret inside a very secret
> He gave his seal to the form of a lion
> Who could be this secret other than Ali.
>
> *Muhammed Mirac'ın yoluna girdi*
> *Bu sır gayet sır içinde sır idi*
> *Şir donunu, Hatem mührünü verdi*
> *Bu sırrın kim eder Ali'den gayrı.*[14]
>
> The night of the ascent of the lord of the Prophet [Mohammad]
> The Şah [Ali] is a lion in the seventh floor of heaven.

Server enbiyanın Miraç gecesi
Yedinci kat gökte arslan olan Şah.

(By the poet Kul Himmet.[15])

It should be mentioned that Balım Sultan, the second great master of the Bektashi order after Hacı Bektaş, was compared to Ali and, consequently, to a lion:

He walks waddlingly like a lion
He hides in himself the secret of God.

Arslan gibi apıl apıl yürüyen
Kendi özün Hak sırrına bürünen.

(By the poet Kazak Abdal.[16])

The legend presented in the *miracname* published by Yusuf Ziya and in these poems is partly inspired by the interpretation of the *mirac* in the Shi'i tradition. First of all, it is attributed to Hatai/Shah Ismail, the Persian king who declared Shi'ism to be the religion of Iran at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Many of his disciples, called Kızılbaş (Red Hat), were Turkish nomads from Anatolia. We also know that in the Twelver Shi'i tradition, Ali played a prominent role in the *mirac*; actually, Ali's divinity was revealed by God to Mohammad at that very moment. On the other hand, it is also believed that God created an angel identical to Ali who met Mohammad.[17] More interestingly, if we look at the Ismaili tradition, and particularly at the Nusayri sect, we notice that Selman also participated in the *mirac* and that Mohammad, Ali and Selman constitute a 'divine trinity'.[18] Yet we may wonder if an encounter between the Prophet and Ali in the shape of a lion existed in the Twelver Shi'i and Ismaili tradition. This is a point that needs further research.

The assembly of the Forty is a major symbol in the Bektashi order, for it is said to be the prototype of the Bektashi and Alevi major ceremonial (*aynicem*) and has influenced some of its rituals, especially the initiation ceremony. Several elements, places and prayers (particularly the *tercüman*) of this ritual allude to Ali, as, for example, the candlestick (*cerağ*).[19] The identification of Ali with a lion appears in prayers: for example, in the *tercüman-ı meydancı* in the form '*Şhah-ı Merdan Şir-i Yezdan*', or in the *tercüman-ı Selām* as '*Şir-i merdan*'.[20] It is needless to analyse here the whole of this ceremony, and it will suffice to point to some part of the initiation ritual, especially the section that alludes to the lion of Ali. First of all, we do know that in the assembly a particular sheepskin, called a *post*, is devoted

to Ali. It is usually situated at the left of the *taht*, a little throne consisting of three steps called '*taht-i Muhammed*', which represents the Prophet. This *post* of Ali is called the '*post* of Ali al-Murteza', or '*post* of Ali Heyder-i Kerrar'.[21] The position in the centre of the hall is called the *dar* (gallows) or the *dar-ı Mansur*; that is, the place that recalls the sacrifice of the famous Mansur el-Hallac (d. 922). And in his analysis of the initiation ritual, Yusuf Ziya suggests that after entering the hall (*meydan*) and when stopping at the *dar* the new initiate is like Mohammad facing the lion. Thus, for Yusuf Ziya, the *post* alludes to the lion.[22]

Drawings and calligraphic compositions in the form of a lion

The figure of the lion is frequently employed in the paintings of the Sufi lodges and in calligraphic pictures peculiar to the Bektashi order. These figures are twofold: simple drawings of lions, and calligraphic compositions in the form of a lion. Hacı Bektash, the eponymous master of the Bektashi order, was usually represented in pictures with a deer on one side and a lion on the other, two sacred animals in Bektashi mythology (Plate 5).[23] In another drawing there is a calligraphic composition in the form of a man, presented as the 'perfect man', standing on one or two fishes with a lion in one hand and a serpent in the other (Plate 6).[24] Some Bektashi pictures frequently have double lions (Figure 40) with the following writing:

> Thou are the Lord of a fortunate conjunction and of the Zolfaqar sword, O Ali
> Thou are the king of the brave, the lion of the world, the hero, O Ali
>
> *Zülfikar'ın tığ ile sahipkıransın ya Ali*
> *Şah-ı merdan, Şir-i Yezdan kahramansın ya Ali*[25]

The figure of the lion was also introduced into some other Sufi lineages more or less linked to the Bektashi order and to Anatolian crypto-Shi'i movements. I believe that this explains the presence of this figure in several examples of the iconography of the Rifai order, where the lion is represented as a guardian of the mausoleum of Ahmad Rifai, the founder of the lineage.[26] Ahmad Rifai was also depicted as riding a lion with a snake in his hand, as were many Bektashi saints.[27] Moreover, we know that there were drawings of lions painted by Sufis on the walls of both a *madrasa* at Konya and the famous Mevlevi lodge of Galata at Istanbul.[28]

Worthy of interest are the calligraphic compositions in the form of a lion that use the Arabic script to delineate the living form of this animal.

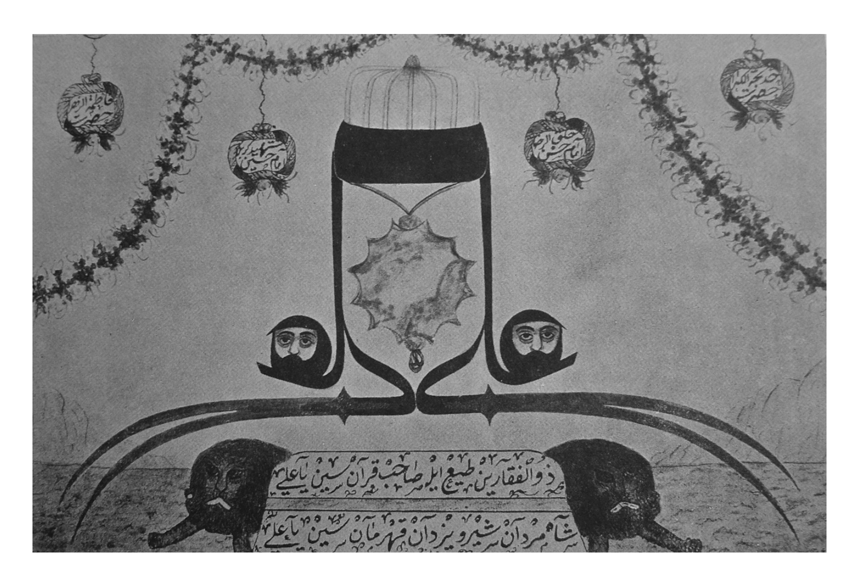


Figure 40 Bektashi drawing with double lions; private collection, Istanbul. After Malik Aksel, *Türklerde Dinî Resimler* (Religious Pictures among the Turks), Istanbul, Elif, 1967, p. 125.

Such calligraphic compositions exist in Iran and appear in several pictures that represent a lion, made from either the *besmele* or the Shi'i prayer *nād-Ali*. According to Schimmel, one of the first known *nād-Ali*s in the shape of a lion was made by Mahmud Nishapuri, Shah Tahmasp's favourite calligrapher in the sixteenth century.[29] Such calligraphies also exist in the Indian subcontinent.[30] Regarding Ottoman Turkey, the earliest known calligraphic composition in the form of a lion appeared in 1458, in a book prepared for Sultan Mehmed II. This picture presents quite an interesting particularity, for the tail of the lion terminates in the head of a serpent (Figure 41).[31] That is to say, these two animals are frequently associated, as is the case, for instance, with the motif of a man riding a tiger or lion and wielding a snake by way of a whip (see the beginning of the chapter and note 4). However, we are told by Çağman and Tanındı that these first specimens of calligraphic pictures (another is dated 1560) are not the 'symbols of a definite Sufi tendency'[32]; moreover, these figures are not specific representations of Ali and are not composed of Shi'i invocations, although the name of Ali is written in the face of one of these lions (Figure 41).

The Bektashi calligraphic compositions were very popular in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Bektashi and Alevi milieu, and there exist numerous calligraphic compositions of this kind made by Bektashi artists up to the beginning of the twentieth century, and even

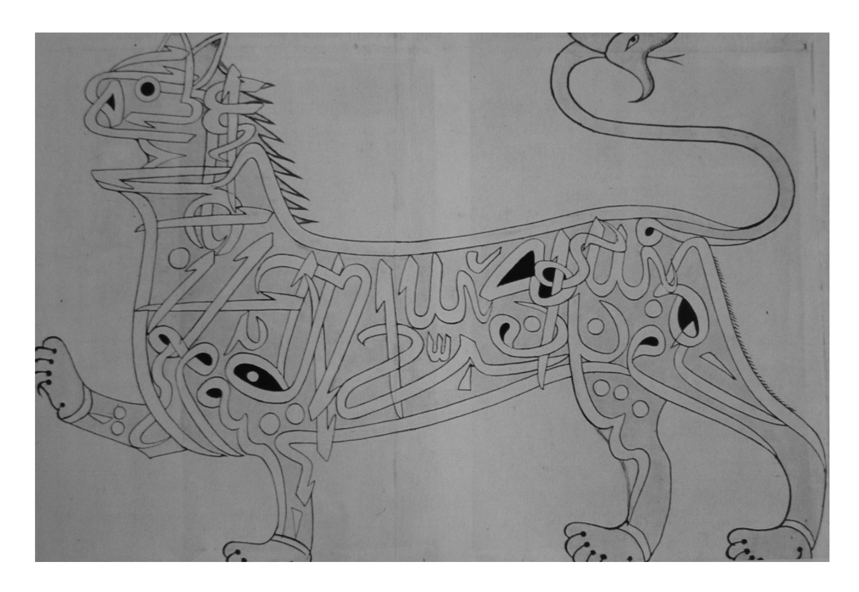


Figure 41 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion (1458); from Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. After Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, 'Illustrations and the art of the book in the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire', in A.Y. Ocak (ed.), *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, Ankara, TTK, 2006, pp. 501–527, picture no. 17.

today. These calligraphic compositions are also a sign that the Anatolian crucible was the place for the mingling of the figure of the lion and of the theosophy of letters; that is, Hurufism, a doctrine strongly influenced by Shi'ism that was widespread in Anatolia after the fourteenth century. Hurufism permeated the Bektashi order and there are famous Bektashi-Hurufi paintings consisting of human faces made up from the Arabic letters of Allah, Mohammad and the first three imams.[33] The fact that these paintings are frequently associated with the calligraphies of the lion (Figure 42) demonstrates that these calligraphies became widespread in Anatolian Bektashism under a strong Hurufi influence. There is, however, an important difference between the representations of the man with letters by the Hurufi and the lion created from letters. The letters that constitute the body of the man are attributes of God and demonstrate the divinity of man. Conversely, the letters that constitute the shape of the lion do not bear any theosophic values; they point only to the identification of Ali with a lion, which is confirmed by the meaning of these Arabic letters. Here, the Hurufi iconology was reduced to only an aesthetic aspect. However, it may suggest that Ali is God.

Usually the Arabic letters and sentences that constitute the form of the lion refer to Ali and to his qualities. More precisely, this lion is



Figure 42 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion with the name Ali written twice in the face of a human, stained glass; from private collection, Istanbul. After 56. *Müzayede Osmanlı ve Karma Sanat Eserleri Müzayedesi*, 2007, *Ramada Plaza Hotel*, Istanbul, 2007, p. 25.

made of Shi'i invocations, although there is at least one example of a Bektashi lion that is not made of invocations but, rather, is created from a verse by Attar in 1795.[34] The writing that composes the form of the lions is not easily readable, but it all refers to Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb as the lion of God (*asadollah*), as the face of God (*vechullah el-galib*), or as the victorious (*el-galib*). For example, two lions are entirely formed by the sentence: Ali the son of Ebu Taleb, the beneficence of God, the face of the Victorious, may God be pleased with him' (*Ali ibn-i Ebu Talip keremallahü vechehülgalip, radiyallahü taalā anhü*) (Figures 43 and 44). Two other lions have the following invocation: 'In the name of the lion of God, the face of God, the victorious, Ali the son of Ebu Taleb' (*bismi esedullah vechullah el-galib Ali ibn-i Ebu Talip*) (Figures 45 and 46). Two others read: 'Ali is the lion of God, the attributes of the Merciful, verily Ali is my God' (*Ali esedullâh sifat ul-rahman, wa Ali rabbi*) (Figures 42 and 47). One sentence is frequently mentioned in the Bektashi rituals: *Ali ibn-i Ebu Talip esedallahü'l-galip keremallu vechihi ve radiyallahu taalā anhü*.[35] Surprisingly, two lions have a human head (Figures 42 and 47), a sign that this animal is half human (Ali) and half lion. In another drawing the lion is associated with a genuine Hurufi



Figure 43 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion; from Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. After Malik Aksel, *Türklerde Dinî Resimler* (Religious Pictures among the Turks), Istanbul, Elif, 1967, p. 85.



Figure 44 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion; from Hacıbektaş Museum, Turkey. After Malik Aksel, *Türklerde Dinî Resimler* (Religious Pictures among the Turks), Istanbul, Elif, 1967, p. 89.

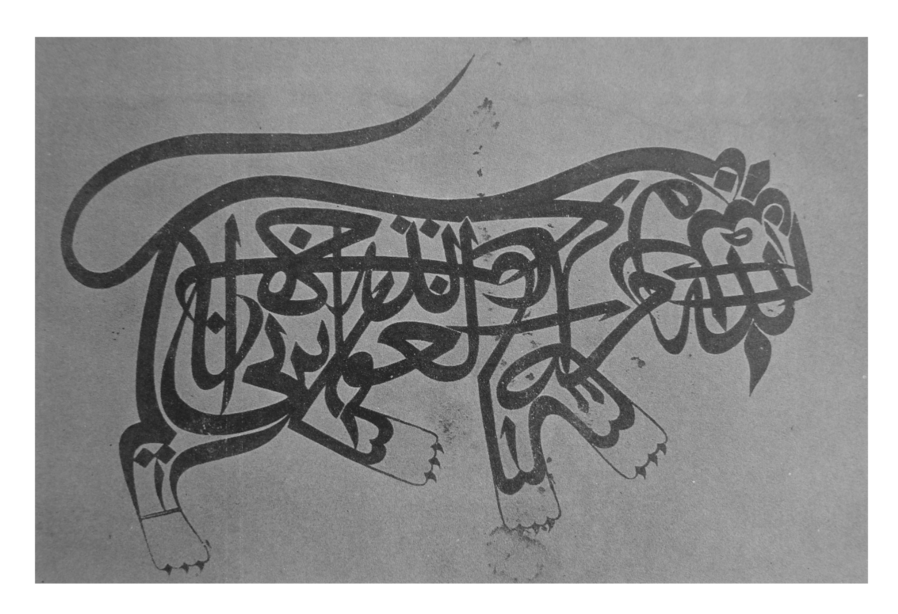


Figure 45 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion. After John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London, Luzac, 1965, p. 237.

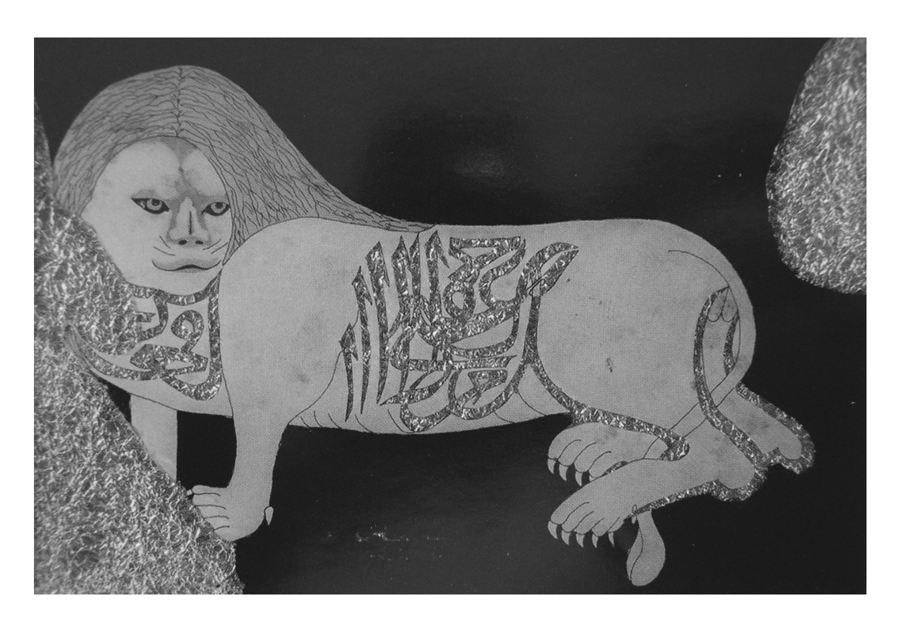


Figure 46 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion, stained glass; from private collection, Istanbul. After *56. Müzayede Osmanlı ve Karma Sanat Eserleri Müzayedesi, 2007, Ramada Plaza Hotel*, Istanbul, 2007, p. 55.

calligraphy representing the letters '*Ya Ali*' in the form of a human face (Figure 42).

Concluding remarks

It is important to mention that the symbol of the lion has been influential to the contemporary history of the Alevi-Bektashi organization; a political party (The Party for the Unity of Turkey), set up by Alevi politicians in

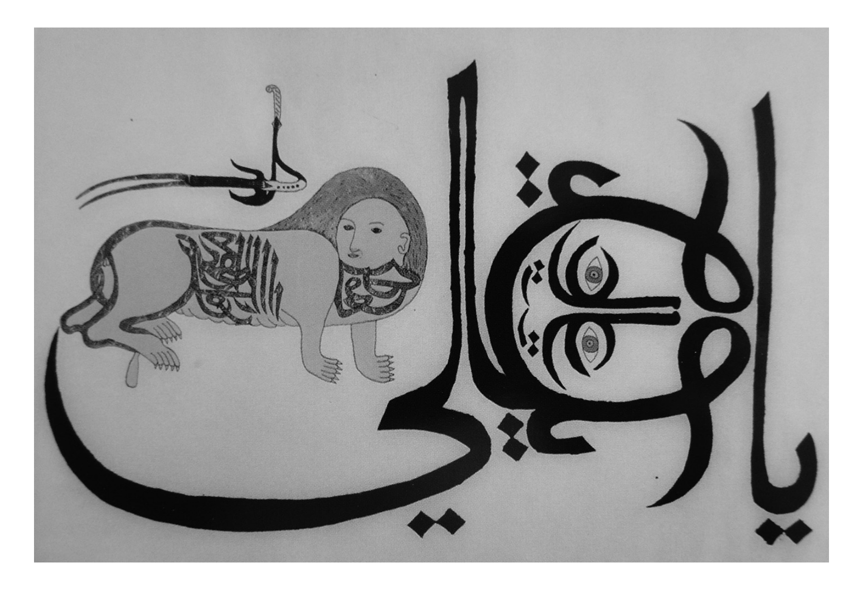


Figure 47 Calligraphic composition in the form of a lion with the name Ali written twice in the face of a human, stained glass; from private collection, Istanbul. After *56. Müzayede Osmanlı ve Karma Sanat Eserleri Müzayedesi, 2007, Ramada Plaza Hotel*, Istanbul, 2007, p. 25.



Figure 48 Flag of the Party for the Unity of Turkey, set up by Alevi politicians in 1966.

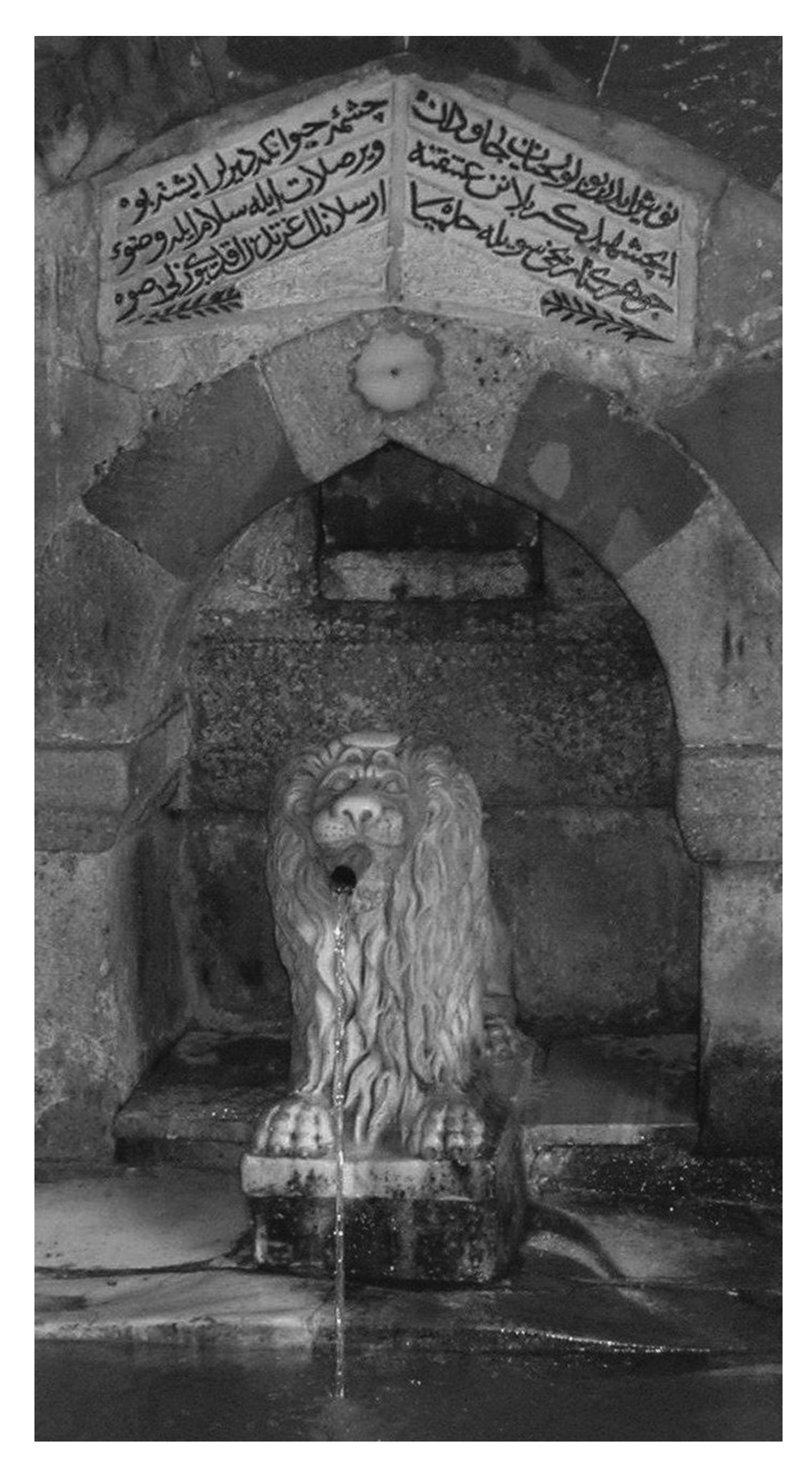


Figure 49 The Lion Fountain (Arslanlı Çeşme), mother lodge of the Bektashi order at Hacıbektaş, Central Anatolia. © Th. Zarcone 1984.

1966, gave the lion a place in its flag. This flag is composed of a lion – Ali – surrounded by 12 stars: the Twelve Imams (Figure 48).[36]

Finally, reference must be made to several statues of lions' heads used as fountains or drainpipes in certain Sufi lodges. In general, numerous Byzantine drainpipes and gargoyles in the form of lions' heads were used by the Seljuks and the Ottomans for their own buildings. Some of them were incorporated into Bektashi lodges, and the symbolism of the lion was reinterpreted as the lion of Ali. Such drainpipes exist at the lodge of Geyikli Baba (Figure 49), near Bursa, and in the famous Bektashi lodge of Shah Kulu at Merdivenköy, in the suburbs of Istanbul.[37] However, we also know of genuine Bektashi fountains with such figures. The most famous of these fountains, called *Arslanlı Çeşme*, the Lion Fountain, belongs to the mother lodge of the Bektashi order at Hacıbektaş in Central Anatolia. This fountain, built in 1554–5 and situated in the second courtyard of the lodge complex, has a lion's head in marble from whose mouth the water flows (Figure 50). This lion's head was brought from Egypt in 1853–4 by a female follower of the order living in Egypt, and incorporated into the fountain. From an inscription dated 1853–4 we learn that the fountain was also called the Animals' Fountain (*Çeşme-i hayvan*), and that the water flowing from the mouth of the lion bestows immortal life (*hayat-i cavidan*). The writing *Ya Ali*, carved above the head of the lion with a drawing of Zolfaqar, confirms that this lion alludes to Ali.[38] There is another quite interesting fountain



Figure 50 Fountain with a head of a lion at the Bektashi lodge of Abd Allah (nineteenth century), Katerini, Northern Greece. © B. Tanman.



Figure 51 Gargoyle with a lion head at the lodge of Geyikli Baba, Bursa. © B. Tanman.

with a lion's head at the Bektashi lodge of Abd Allah (nineteenth century), at Katerini, in northern Greece. For mysterious reasons, this lion's head was integrated into a grave that is topped by Bektashi headgear and a *teslim taş* (stone of surrender), a stone with twelve flutings for the Twelve Imams, which is the most common symbol of the order (Figure 51).[39]

Notes

1. Gransard-Desmond 2000: see his bibliography pp. 70–74; Aranegui Gasco 2004.
2. Pastoureau 2004, p. 53.
3. The transliteration of Ottoman words in this chapter follows Redhouse's *Turkish-Ottoman-English Dictionary.*
4. Köprülü 1950, pp. 598–609; Roux 1966, pp. 259–261, 345–348. For more information on the lion in Central Asia, see Garrone (forthcoming).
5. Aksel 1964; van Bruinessen 1991; Digby 1994; Danık 2004. See also my study (Zarcone forthcoming), *L'Homme-au-lion-et-au-serpent dans le monde turc.*
6. Grenard 1900, pp. 9–11.
7. Öney 1969; Khosronejad 2007.
8. Cahen 1970; Mélikoff 2005.
9. Name of a genre especially devoted to this holy event.
10. Yusuf Ziya 2002, pp. 62–63. See also Birge 1965, pp. 137–138.
11. McElwain 1993, pp. 160–163. This *miracname* is reproduced in popular literature published by contemporary Alevi publishing houses; see Şimşek n.d., p. 26.
12. Bozkurt 1990, pp. 75–80.
13. For more information on Ali in popular Turkish literature, see Çetin 2005.
14. In Öztelli 1997, p. 16.
15. In Öztelli 1997, p. 30. See also Arslanoğlu 1976, pp. 42–43.
16. Nüzhet 1930, p. 200.
17. Regarding the *meraj* in Shi'ism, see Amir-Moezzi 1996, pp. 100–101, 105–106.
18. Bar-Asher and Kofsky 1996, pp. 136, 146–147; Bar-Asher and Kofsky 2005, pp. 138–143.
19. Soyyer 2005, p. 217.

20. Soyyer 2005, pp. 260, 273.
21. Necîb 1925, p. 10; Soyyer 2005, pp. 221, 228, 233.
22. ‘*Dernek’e kapıdan girerken, dār’a durmak, arslan karşısında Muhammed’in vaziyetini temsil ediyor olarak Kabul edilmektedir. Post arslandan kinayedir*’, Yusuf Ziya 2002, p. 55.
23. On the deer, see Zarcone 2000.
24. See several versions of this drawing in Birge 1965, p. 242; Aksel 1967, p. 112; de Jong 1989, p. 29. I disagree with the interpretation of this figure given by Birge (pp. 240–243) because these animals are more than the symbols of the stellar constellations of Scorpio, Pisces, and Leo.
25. See other versions of this drawing in Birge 1965, p. 234; Aksel 1967, p. 125; de Jong 1989, pp. 24, 26.
26. It is confirmed that Shi’i and Bektashi ideas were introduced into the Rifai order; see Tanman 2001, p. 7, footnote 19 (with many pictures).
27. van Bruinessen 1991, p. 57.
28. Mustafa Sakin Dede. 1866–7. *Sefîne-yi nefîse-yi Mevleviyân*. Cairo: Matba’a-ı Vehbiye. Vol. 3, p. 54, quoted by Çağman and Tanındı 2006, p. 526.
29. Schimmel 1984, p. 112. The *nād-ali* prayer exists also in a Bektashi drawing of the lion; see Aksel 1967, p. 88.
30. Two are kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. IM.5–1916). One of them was presented at the exhibition ‘East-West – Objects between Cultures’, 1 September 2006–18 February 2007, Tate Britain, London (see www.tate.org.uk).
31. Çağman and Tanındı 2006, p. 524, pictures nos. 17 and 19.
32. Çağman and Tanındı 2006, p. 524.
33. See Algar 1995, pp. 41–42; Bayat 2004; Usluer 2007.
34. Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Münich (this picture was published in Schimmel 1970, pl. LXVII a).
35. In the prayer dedicated to the ‘*tekbir-i tac-ı şerîf*’, Soyyer 2005, p. 280.
36. Subaşı 2005, p. 88.
37. Baha Tanman saw this drainpipe (which has now disappeared) in the 1960s. It was located on the northern wall of the main building of the lodge, in the section where the unmarried (*mücerred*) dervishes were living (oral communication from Baha Tanman, June 2007).
38. Koşay 1967, pp. 22–23; Noyan 1964, pp. 19–20; Tarım 1948, pp. 109–110; Tanman 2006, p. 377.
39. Tanman 1990, pp. 23, 25.

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Calligraphic Lions Symbolising the Esoteric Dimension of ʿAlī's Nature

Raya Shani

Introduction

IN THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY *KITĀB AL-RÛḤ* BY Ibn Qayyim, which deals with the location of the spirit (*nafs*) after death, the author refers to the opinion of those espousing transmigration (*mutanasikha*), who claim that 'every spirit goes to the body of an animal most similar to the particular characteristics acquired by that spirit during its lifetime.... The *mutanasikha* say that the lion-like soul is going to a lion's body.'[1]

Bearing in mind the esoteric notions in this quoted statement, I present herein a study of an artistic genre designed to communicate the inherent spiritualised conjunction between the lionlike characteristics of ʿAlī, acquired by his spirit during his lifetime, and a lion's body symbolising the eternal existence of ʿAlī after death: it deals with calligraphic lions whose bodies are constructed of sacred formulas related to ʿAlī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib, a genre in which the sacred texts making up the lion forms create a calligraphic enigma with a hidden message that signifies the esoteric dimension of ʿAlī as 'the lion of God', his common epithet.[2]

Whether they were designed for their inherent spiritual or calligraphic merits, these calligraphic lions soon became widely diffused in areas of Persian cultural influence, from Ottoman Turkey to Muslim India, indeed often conceived as a religious icon intended to manifest the supreme nature of ʿAlī's existence as the lion of God.

The earliest known calligraphic lion appears in the Topkapi Library's grand scroll of Mehmet II (EH. 2827), dated 862 AH/1458 AD (Figure 52).[3] Seen in profile, striding from left to right, the lion is formed by cursive letters composing the following exclamation: *Asadollah al-ghālib ʿAlī*



Figure 52 Calligraphic lion on scroll of Mehmet II, dated 862 AH/1458 AD, Istanbul, Topkapi Serai Library, EH. 2827: *Asadollah al-ghālib ‘Ali Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib*, *Amīr al-Mu’menīn, karram ‘llah wajha-hu, raḍiyy ’llah ‘anhu*. Courtesy of the Topkapi Serai Library.

Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib, *Amīr al-Mu’menīn, karram ’llah wajha-hu, raḍiyy ’llah ‘anhu* (The victorious lion of God ‘Alī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib, Amīr al-Mu’menīn, may God ennoble his face and be pleased by him). Written from right to left, the Arabic formula naturally starts from the lion’s head and ends at his hindquarters.

The head is made up of the first phrase, thus conspicuously declaring the inherent, abstract connection between ‘Alī and the victorious lion of God. Hence, the letters comprising the name of ‘Alī and his famous epithet *asadollah* are closely interconnected, as is also the case of the latter and his adjective *al-ghālib*. Thus, starting inside the curved space of the *‘ayn* of *‘Alī*, the *sīn* of *asad* moves from below to above along the lion’s neck, ending in the *dād* that forms the right ear of the lion. A similarly vertical stroke belonging to the hook-headed *alif* of the following word, *allah*, is then tightly interwoven with the double *lām* and the *hā* of that word, which run, from top to bottom, back to the *‘ayn* in *‘Alī*. At the same time, the horizontal stroke of the hook-headed *alif* of *asad* moves parallel to the *lām* of *‘Alī*, thus connecting the back of the lion’s head with the front, whose outline is made up of the adjective *al-ghālib*. Here, the first four letters, drawn from top to bottom, define the outline of the lion’s forehead, nose and nostrils, with the

black filling of *ghayn* making the mouth, and the diacritical mark or letter-pointing (*nuqṭah*) of the same letter signifying the eye, itself consisting of a bright circle filled in with a smaller circle in black. The two last letters of *ghālib* are drawn in the opposite direction, from bottom to top, their combined ligatures forming the lion's cheek and his second ear.

Next is the name *'Alī*, tightly connected as we saw with the letters comprising the epithet, all concentrated around the lion's head. The final *yā* of *'Alī* curves along the lion's back, culminating in a raised tail shaped like a dragon's head facing to the left. 'Alī's prominent position in the formula is here emphasised by the fact that his name is the only word that can be clearly read when viewed as the scroll format demands, with the lion's head at the top and its hindquarters at the bottom.[4]

Looking again at the lion as it strides from left to right, one sees that the outlines of its chest and belly are defined by the long and relatively thick curved ligatures of letters, with the vertically written *nūn* and the horizontally written *yā* standing, respectively, for the last letter of the following two words: *Ibn* and *Abī*. In this context, the hook-headed *alif* of *Ibn* crosses the *'ayn* of *'Alī* in a horizontal stroke, while the *bā* and *nūn* of the same word define, from top to bottom, the outline of the lion's chest, with a blank dot to the left representing the letter-pointing of the *nūn*.

The final *yā* of *Abī*, which makes the lion's belly, is drawn upside down, as are the other letters comprising the word: it starts with a vertical hook-headed *alif* drawn upside down inside the lion's body, dividing the chest and belly, and continues with the similarly upside down hook-headed *bā* and the beginning of the curve of the final *y*ā, which together make the back of the lion's foreleg. The pair of blank dots placed above could be seen as representing the diacritical mark of the final *yā*, although the left one could also stand for the diacritic of the *bā* belonging to *abī*.

The following word, *Ṭālib*, occupies an inner surface of the body, above the striding foreleg over the thigh, where it figures as a compound ligature, with the *ṭā* and the hook-headed *alif* done in long, oblique strokes from bottom to top. The similarly oblique hook-headed *lām* and the following *bā* are both upside down.

The rest of the formula is drawn inside the lion's body, where the words and letters appear to constitute the organs within the chest, belly, hindquarters and inner thighs of the four legs.

To the right of *Ṭālib* come the three components of 'Alī's legitimising religiopolitical title *Amīr al-mu'menīn*, occupying the lower cavity of the lion's chest and parts of the two forelegs. The horizontally drawn, hook-headed *alif* appears to belong to the first word, *amīr*, whose *mīm* is shared

with the first *mīm* of *al-Muʼmenīn*. The diacritical mark of the *yā* of *amīr*, as well as the final *rā*, are both rendered inside the raised foreleg. The next two hook-headed letters, both done in oblique lines inside the lion's chest, seem to represent the *alif* and *lām* of *al* (*Muʼmenīn*), the *lām* interlacing with the first *mīm* of *Muʼmenīn* (shared with that of *amīr*). This *mīm* is further interlaced with the next letter, *waw*, whose long, curved tail runs parallel to the contour of the lion's chest.

Here, for the first time, the scribe added a vocalisation sign (*tashkīl*): a *hamzah* inscribed above the *waw*. The looped forms of *muʼmenīn*'s first *mīm* and *waw* and of the following *mīm* are all filled in with black, like the *ṭā* of *Ṭālib*, thus making a compositional link. The white dot inscribed inside the *ṭā* may accordingly be considered the diacritical sign of the first *nūn* of *muʼmenīn*. If this is so, the diacritical sign of the final *nūn* of *muʼmenīn*, which ends in a broad curve defining the right-side outline of the foreleg, could be the blank dot above it, placed next to the diacritical dot of the *bā* in the word *abī*. Thus, both the right and left dots, in fact, represent simultaneously the letter-pointings of the final *yā* of *abī* and those of the *bā* of *abī* and the *nūn* of *muʼmenīn*.

The benediction phrase *Karram ʼllah wajha-hu* is written along the inside of the lion's belly, with the *Karram ʼllah* placed in the centre, the hook-headed *alif* of *allah* penetrating the *kā* of *karram*. The latter is accompanied by vocalisation signs that, in a way, emphasise its distinguished position in the centre: this benediction, which specifically refers to the purity of ʻAlī's face, may be related to certain traditions according to which Muḥammad said that observing ʻAlī's face and talking of his virtues counts as a form of worship.[5]

The uniqueness of ʻAlī's face was expressed, as we saw, through the construction of the head of his symbol, the lion, by the epithet *asadollah al-ghālib*. One may assume that the same idea influenced the calligrapher in assigning an appropriate emphasis to this benediction as well. Indeed, the next word, *wajha-hu*, is even more prominent in overall bearing, mainly because of its tightly interlacing letters and the black colour added, which together create an intensity that seems to jump out of the frame. Also striking is the way in which the blank circle representing the diacritical dot of *jīm* is fitted into the broad cavity of the *waw*. Perhaps most impressive of all is the compact relationship created by the word *wajha-hu* with the word *allah*, belonging to the following phrase, *raḍiyy ʼllah ʻanhu*. Outstanding is also the way in which the hook-headed *alif* of that *allah* is interwoven with the letters *waw*, *jīm* and *hā* comprising the word *wajha-hu*, thus connecting the two words in a single, interrelated compound unit.

The remaining components of the phrase *wa raḍiyy 'llah 'anhu* occupy the lion's hindquarters fully. Starting with the outer hind leg, the inner outline of its thigh is defined by the letter *waw*, whose looped surface is filled in with black, while the outer contour is made by the *yā* of the word *raḍiyy*. The *rā* and *ḍād* are drawn between the two outlines of the same hind leg, with the hook-headed *rā* penetrating the relatively large black surface of the *ḍād*. A *fatḥāh* is added above the curved line of *rā*, while the *ḍād* is topped by its own diacritical sign, represented by a blank dot placed above. The last word, *'anhu*, is drawn from top to bottom along the second hind leg, also partly defining its front outline. A blank dot above the *nūn* represents its own diacritical sign, whereas the pair of similarly blank dots next to it could represent the diacritical sign of the final *yā* of the word *raḍiyy*, or even that of *abī* right above, along the outline of the lion's belly. However this may be, these dots are obviously misplaced, as was the letter *mīm* at the top left of the lion's hindquarters, probably representing the absent final *mīm* of the word *karram* that runs along the lion's belly.

Also inexplicable is the single blank dot added inside the curved surface of *'ayn* of the word *'anhu*, which nonetheless balances the dot inside the curved surface of the nearby *waw*, which represents the letter-pointing of the *jīm* of *wajha-hu*; the many diacritical marks may imply that the calligrapher was aware of the significance of the dot in mystical writings, where it is embellished with metaphorical images related to 'Alī as the fountainhead of all writing. It is in such writings that the diacritical sign of the letter *bā*, which is the starting point for the pen's movement and the source for measuring all letters, signifies the Primordial Dot.[6] In Shī'ī tradition, in particular, 'Alī himself is seen as the dot beneath the *bā,* thus signifying the first manifestation of creation.[7] This image is related to the concept commonly held by mystics that the dot beneath the *bā* of the *besmellah* is the point of transition between the absolute non-manifestation of the essence (symbolised by the *alif*) and its manifestation (symbolised by the *bā*).

In this context, the diacritic forming the lion's eye, which differs in size and form from all the other diacritical signs, is the most striking. The lion's eye may also refer to the double meaning assigned in Ṣūfī writings to the sound of the letter *'ayn*, which signifies both an eye and a fountainhead, the latter demarcating in particular the esoteric dimension of 'Alī.[8] Within this frame of reference, the diacritical sign of the letter *ghayn* (in the word *al-ghālib*), inherently connected with the letter *'ayn*, may signify both the lion's eye and the esoteric dimension of 'Alī as a fountainhead.

The same notion perhaps also underlies the separate diacritical dot of the *nūn* of *Ibn* over the *'ayn* of *'Alī*, and the seemingly superfluous diacritical

sign done as a blank circle within the large curve of the letter *ʿayn* of *ʿanhu*. Similar esoteric connections may also explain the special position given to the letter-pointing of the *nūn* in *al-muʾmenīn* inside the black filling of the *ṭā* of *Ṭālib*, thus counterbalancing the prominent shape of the lion's eye.[9]

The process of constructing 'the victorious lion of God' by letters with diacritical and vocalisation signs seems to have been inspired specifically by the mystical thought of the Ḥurūfīs,[10] who attached significance to each character of the Arabo-Persian alphabet and its numerical value – the Ḥurūfīs indeed were prominent at the time when our calligraphic lion was made.[11]

That Ḥurūfī doctrines may have had an impact on Mehmet's religious thought can be at least partly corroborated by pieces of information in the sixteenth-century encyclopaedia of biography (*Shakaiki Numaniye*) by Tash Köprü Zade.[12] Here, one may read that 'there were at the court of Sulṭān Mehmet II at Edirne certain Ḥurūfīs who had contrived to ingratiate themselves with the monarch and to induce him to listen attentively to their expositions of their doctrines'. Mehmet II, 'who was interested in philosophical and literary matters', the author continues, 'treated these sectaries with great courtesy and consideration, even going so far as to appoint special apartments in his palace for their use'. Also according to this author, Mehmet II himself became an initiated follower of the Ḥurūfī movement.[13] Hence, the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll may have been inspired by the Ḥurūfī doctrine, in particular by certain features that characterise its mystical thought.

The first aspect that seems to be reflected in the lion is the basic Ḥurūfī belief that the Arabic letters are an externalised form of the abstractly manifested Word of God, which in itself represents the Primal state of God,[14] and that God's creatures can be represented by these letters because they are the supreme manifestation of God himself.[15]

The second Ḥurūfī aspect, closely interrelated with the first, is the doctrine that 'as all the letters are developed from the Point (*nuqṭah*), so are all men developed from seed (*nuṭghah*)', which, except for a slight difference in diacritical points, is an anagram of *nuqṭah*.[16] This seems to be particularly reflected in the multiple use that is made here of diacritical signs, or letter-pointings.

The third Ḥurūfī aspect that may be reflected in our calligraphic lion is the extraordinary significance attributed to the face; various Ḥurūfī writings indeed claim that God had formed Adam's face from the clay of Mecca[17] (which in the Ḥurūfī context is Alanjaq, the shrine of Faḍlullāh in Azarbaijan).[18] Also according to Ḥurūfī thought, it was the human face in particular [that] came to parallel God's words or scriptures in a literal way,

so that the seven verses, or signs (*āyāt*) of the *Fātiḥa* were equivalent to the seven 'lines' [of hair] shared by all human faces (the hairline, two eyebrows and four sets of eyelashes).[19]

For our specific concern is the Ḥurūfī belief that as in creation so also the end of the world in God's word is reflected in the human face, particularly in its seven openings (i.e. two ears, eyes and nostrils, and the mouth), which are the seven doors of paradise.[20] This incarnationistic concept of the Ḥurūfīs is indeed clearly expressed in the lion image through the emphasis on the facial 'openings', thus creating a close visual linkage between the face of 'Alī's supreme symbol and God's Word.

A fourth Ḥurūfī aspect may be suggested regarding the unique position given to the word *'Alī* and to the dragon-head when viewed as the scroll format demands, with the word *'Alī* placed at the top, moving upward, and the dragon placed at the bottom of the image, with its head facing downward.[21] This arrangement may reflect the Ḥurūfī concept of the cosmic struggle between good and evil, emphasising the lion's movement upward in a way that may symbolise the status of 'Alī, as the 'alī, the highest, *vis-à-vis* the lowest degree of the dragon who faces downward.

However, the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll contains a significant element that does not fit the Ḥurūfī doctrine in its purest form: it glorifies 'Alī, who in Ḥurūfī writings is only secondary to Faḍlallāh.[22] The latter was considered the culmination of history, demonstrated by his physical body, which was the only receptacle for the 32 letters of the Persian alphabet, which are superior to the 28 letters of the Arabic.[23]

It may be assumed, then, that in the original Ḥurūfī doctrine, in its purest form, 'Alī did not reach the supreme status that is undoubtedly reflected in the making of the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll, nor was the Arabic alphabet within it considered as supreme as the Persian. Hence, if any Ḥurūfī views stood at all behind the mystical aspects discernible in our lion, the calligrapher or patron of the latter was probably also influenced by yet another trend, obviously pro-'Alīd, which adopted Ḥurūfī concepts but assimilated them to its own innate devotion to 'Alī.

Indeed, there are at least two main pro-'Alīd trends that adopted some basic concepts of Ḥurūfī doctrine, and to which the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll may well be historically affiliated. The first trend developed in Persia, the motherland of Ḥurūfīsm, particularly in the region of Azerbaijan, where Faḍlallāh and his immediate followers took refuge after they were forced to leave Khorasan because of Timurid persecution.[24] Here they enjoyed relative tolerance in the favourable climate of unorthodoxy prevailing in the region under the rule of the Turkman Qarāquyūnlū dynasty.

At that time, until 1441–2, the Ḥurūfī group was centred in Tabriz, where it was headed by the daughter of Faḍlallāh Astarābādī, Kalimatallāh al-’Ulyā (d. 845 AH/1441–2 AD), who not only was free to act in the capital, but also is known to have exercised considerable influence on Jahān Shāh (d. 1467), the Qarāquyūnlū ruler of the time,[25] whose Shī‘ī inclinations and adoration of ‘Alī are well documented.[26]

In view of the Shī‘ī-oriented Ḥurūfī atmosphere at Jahān Shāh's court at Tabriz, and the commonly accepted theory that Mehmet's lion was done by a Persian calligrapher from Tabriz named ’Ata’allah ibn Muḥammad al-Tabrīzī, whose signature in *nasta'liq* appears elsewhere in the scroll,[27] we may suggest with some confidence that the concept behind the making of Mehmet's calligraphic lion originated in Tabriz, the calligrapher's home. Considering, moreover, that Jahān Shāh was both a man of war and a patron of the arts,[28] one may also cautiously propose that the genre of calligraphic lions was, in fact, invented in the Shī‘ī-oriented Ḥurūfī atmosphere of the Tabrīzī court, perhaps even by ’Ata’allah ibn Muḥammad al-Tabrīzī himself, who, before becoming a chancery scribe at the court of Mehmet II, may have served as calligrapher at the court of Jahān Shāh.[29] He probably left Tabriz as a result of a governmental persecution of the Ḥurūfīs in 1441–2, which forced the latter to leave the region and shift their activities to the Ottoman Empire, some settling in Edirne,[30] the capital of Mehmet II, the patron of our calligraphic lion.[31]

Persia may also be the source for the phrase *Asadollah al-ghālib*, *‘Alī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib*. In the early fifteenth century, under Shāhrokh, the supposed tomb of ‘Alī at Mazar-e Sharīf was discovered in Eastern Khorasan and, according to tradition, it had an inscription containing that phrase.[32] Once ‘discovered’, the tomb of ‘Alī was declared authentic and became a site of pilgrimage for Persians, Ṣūfīs in particular, whose sheikhs from Persia and elsewhere in Central Asia eventually came to Edirne. Arriving there during the reign of Mehmet's father, they continued their activities under Mehmet himself, at whose court they were received with particular honour, and often held high positions.[33]

The second heterodox trend that can be considered relevant to the Shī‘ī-oriented Ḥurūfī doctrines underlying the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll is that prevalent among followers of the Bektāshī order in the Ottoman state.[34] Ḥurūfī beliefs were at that time penetrating the Ottoman towns in Rumelia and Anatolia,[35] where the writings of the great Azeri-Turkish poet Nesīmī (d. 1417), who belonged to this sect,[36] helped its rapid spread on the popular level of the Bektāshīs. That Faḍlallāh's Ḥurūfīsm was readily absorbed among the dervishes of the Bektāshī orders can be understood

without difficulty in view of the fact that both movements had in common the heterodox idea that the form of man is the form of God. As Algar puts it, 'Ḥurūfīs reached this conclusion through their version of the science of letters, Bektāshīs through their Alevi-derived view of ʿAlī as godhead.'[37]

One may consider, then, the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll as an artistic reflection of the merger occurring at the time between the ʿAlevi-derived ideas of the Bektāshīs and those of the Ḥurūfīs.[38] These doctrines presumably penetrated the court of Mehmet II through the military channel of the Janissaries, or 'new troops' (*yeni çeri*), who constituted the chief force of Mehmet's army,[39] and were easily persuaded by Bektāshī dervish missionaries of the mystique of ʿAlī and his double-bladed sword, Zölfaqār, which also became one of their emblems.[40] There is thus a reasonable foundation for the militant aspect of ʿAlī expressed in our calligraphic lion through its phrase *Asadollah al-ghālib ʿAlī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib*.

The possibility of a local rather than a Persian origin of the calligraphic lion may gain support from the dragon's head terminating the lion's tail. Such images are often seen in North Mesopotamian and Anatolian stone carvings from the twelfth century onward, sometimes used as an apotropaic sign. An example of a lion with a tail terminating in a dragon's head appears in the Alaeddin Palace at Konya, where the dragon's head is horned and turns away from the lion's head, which is in profile (Figure 53a).[41]

An ancient symbol of the solar eclipse,[42] a dragon tip on a lion's tail in Islamic iconography represents the horrifying dragon-like *Djawzahr*, the pseudoplanetary body of the ecliptic node that menaces the great luminaries, with the lion symbolising the sun.

True, the motif does occur also in Persian metalwork, where the dragon forms an integral part of some zodiacal signs, the latter also appearing in combination with their own astrological lord.[43] For example, one of the six medallions decorating the body of an early twelfth-century silver bottle in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, shows the tail of a lion ending in a dragon's head facing in the direction opposite to the lion's (Figure 53b).[44] In Persian instances, however, the lion is usually surmounted by a radiant sun, and its long tail, terminating in a dragon head, makes the characteristic loop under the animal's body.

To conclude, whether through the Persian calligrapher from Azerbaijan or through local Bektāshī missionaries, or perhaps a combination of the two, the specific Shīʿī-oriented, Ḥurūfī background of the calligraphic lion in the scroll may be viewed as a reflection of the personal religious inclinations of the patron, Mehmet II, who as a boy, and during certain periods in his life, was inclined to entertain mystical thoughts and religious doctrines directly at



Figure 53a Alaeddin Palace at Konya, twelfth century. After Gönül Oney. 1969. 'Lion Figures in Anatolian Seljuk Architecture', *Anadolu/Anatolia*, 13, pp. 43–67, fig. 48.



Figure 53b One of six medallions decorating the body of an early twelfth-century silver bottle, The Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 50.5. After Esin Atil, William Thomas Chase and Paul Jett (eds.), *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, Washington, DC, the Smithsonian Institution, 1985, p. 84, cat. no. 10.

variance with strict Sunnī theology, such as those that had an evident tendency toward heterodox Shī'ī doctrines and freethinkers.[45]

Perhaps relevant to the making of the calligraphic lion is the fact that Mehmet's association with heretics was also expressed by a close friendship with his librarian, a certain Lutfullāh ibn Ḥasan of Tokat, usually called Mullāh Lutfī or Delī Lutfī (the crazy Lutfī), a heretical personage who was put in charge of the imperial library.[46] Then, around the year 1453, two scribes employed in this library, the brothers Mehmet and Ahmet,[47] belonged to the Bayrāmī order, a popular religious-social movement whose beliefs were also a compound of Shī'īsm and various esoteric doctrines.[48] Assuming that the heretical ideas of the head of the imperial library and of the two Bayrāmī scribes exerted some influence on Mehmet's literary taste, this could suggest another reason to suppose that the Ottoman ruler was inspired by these notions also in commissioning the heretically-oriented calligraphic lion.

Finally, the strongly militant aspect of the lion, apparent also in the phrase *Asadollah al-ghālib*, may be connected with the warlike character of Mehmet II, in particular with his conquests while still keeping the official seat of his sultanate at the former capital of Edirne.[49] Interesting in this context is the fact that with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453,[50] Mehmet II assumed an unprecedented charisma and claimed to be the sole 'holder of the sword of the ghazā'.[51] This proclamation thus provides a further reasonable ground for the militant spirit expressed in our calligraphic lion, obviously meant to symbolise the great victory of its patron.

The calligraphic lion in the scroll of Mehmet II may well have been directly commissioned by Mehmet himself in celebration of his achievements, for which he gained the epithet 'Mehmet the Conqueror'. Whether introduced from Persian Azerbaijan by the Tabrīzī calligrapher working on the scroll, or by local followers of Shī'ī-inclined heretical movements, it is in this calligraphic lion that the epithet and blessings attributed to 'Alī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib actually touch the essence of his divinity as the victorious lion of God whose face is ennobled by Him.

Calligraphic lions in the art of the Bektāshīs

Probably following the early prototype established in Mehmet II's scroll, the same calligraphic genre using the same phrasing spread among the Bektāshīs in Turkey and the Balkans, the letters similarly fitted into the shape of a lion meant to represent 'Alī's divinity.

A relatively recent example is a calligraphic lion painted on paper made in the 1980s by Turgut Reshadi Bābā, the only remaining Bektāshī *bābā* in Istanbul still working in the classical tradition (Figure 54). It shows



Figure 54 Calligraphic lion painted on paper (16 x 22 cm), made in the 1980s by Turgut Reshadi Bābā, Bektāshī *bābā* in Istanbul. After Frederick De Jong, 'The iconography of Bektāshīism: a survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costumes, liturgical objects and pictorial art', in F. Déroche, A. Gacek and J. J. Witkam (eds.), *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 4, Leiden, Brill, 1989, pl. 16.

a lion whose body is constructed by the same phrases as in Mehmet's scroll, indeed a typical component of the Bektāshī versions. However, in this lion special emphasis is given to the face, shown in full view, with ʻAlī's name following the contours of the eyebrows, the nose and the mouth. Thus, each of the three letters of the name constructs half of the lion's face – the *ʻayn* representing the eye, the *lām* the nose, and the *yā* the lips and moustache. Each letter is mirror-imaged to compose the full-face view. This rendering, making the lion's face out of two reflecting halves, is directly related to a notion the Bektāshīs adopted from the Ḥurūfī doctrine regarding the letters of the alphabet as external manifestations of a hidden meaning related to the Truth. The mirror image, usually called *musenna* or *muthana*, may also constitute a reference to the exoteric and esoteric (*ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*) aspects of ʻAlī, which are essential to Ṣūfī ideology in general and the Bektāshīs in particular.[52]

Altogether, one may regard the calligraphic lion of this Bektāshī example as an innovative form. It certainly expresses in a most articulate manner the Shīʻī-inclined, Ḥurūfī-Bektāshī belief that the blessed face of ʻAlī is the

manifestation of God. In this lion's face the belief is further expressed by the fact that the broad ligature of the three letters comprising 'Alī's name actually provides a frame for the name of Allāh; thus, the face of the lion, formed by the letters of 'Alī's name, is the essence of the external, corporal manifestation of the Divine. In this context, one may also refer to the calligraphic panels called *levha*, frequently found on the walls of contemporary *tekke*s of Alevi dervishes in Turkey and the Balkans, where the name of 'Alī is similarly used to construct a human face shown in full view (Figure 55).

The same Bektāshī code is articulated in a calligraphic panel in the *tekke* of Durbali-Sultan in Thessalia in Greece (Figure 56). Painted on paper, it consists of figurative and calligraphic elements dominated by the mirror image of 'Alī's name with that of Moḥammad, much smaller, above it. Two human faces mirror each other inside the first letter of 'Alī's name, *'ayn*, and that of 'Alī's celebrated double-pointed sword is here integrated with the broad ligature of the next two letters of the name, *lām* and *yā*.[53] To complete the circle of symbolic aspects attached to 'Alī and the letters comprising his name, two lions are crawling under each of the double-pointed swords constructed by the letter *yā*. Both lions, in mirror image, are entangled in a serpent, returning the viewer to the concept of good and evil, detected, as recalled, behind the dragon head that ends the tail of the calligraphic lion in Mehmet's scroll (Figure 52).[54]

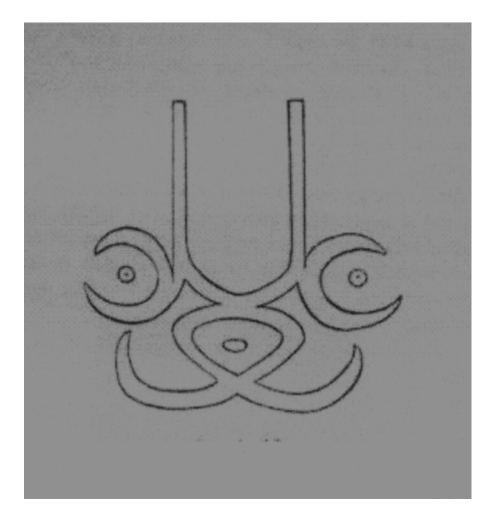


Figure 55 Calligraphic panel (38 x 46 cm), *levha*, with 'Alīs name used to construct a human face, found in a contemporary *tekke* of Alevi dervishes in Turkey or the Balkans. After Aleksander Matkovski, 'Les blasons représentant l'Empire Ottoman en Europe', in *IVème Congrès International d'art turc Aix-en-Provence 10–15 Septembre, 1971*, Aix-en-Provence, University Press, 1976, p. 135 and fig. 13.

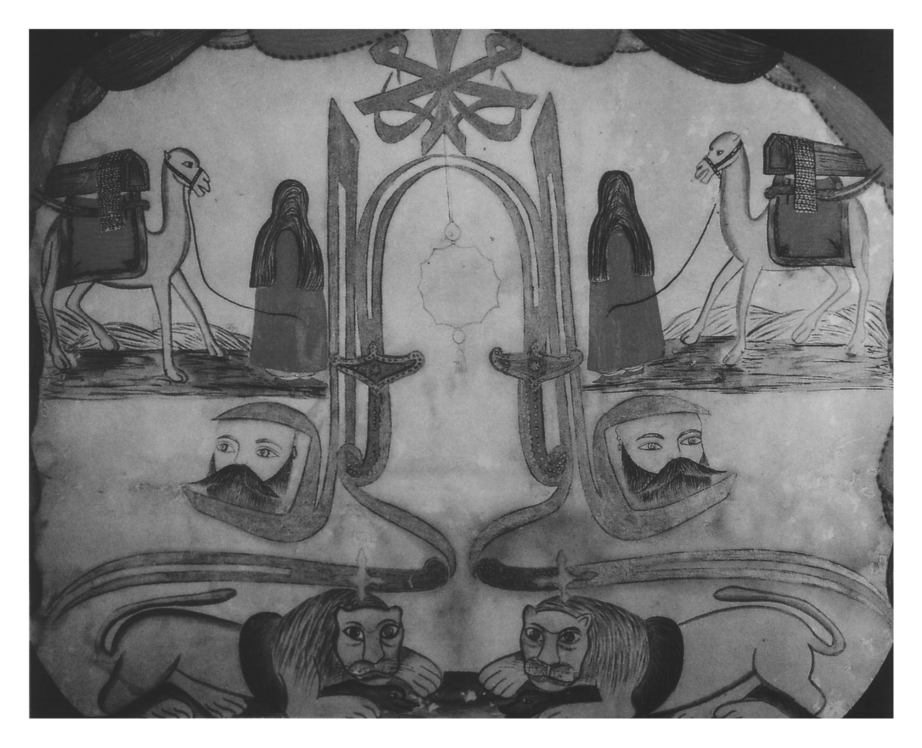


Figure 56 Calligraphic panel, *levha*, from the Bektāshī *tekke* of Durbali-Sultan in Thessalia, Greece. After Frederick De Jong, ‘The iconography of Bektāshīism: a survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art’, in F. Déroche, A. Gacek and J.J. Witkam (eds.), *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 4, Leiden, Brill, 1989, pl. 8.

Another way of responding to the same concept appears in a calligraphic panel dated 1210 AH/1795–6 AD from a Bektāshī *tekke* (Figure 57a). It represents a lion assaulting a dragon-like creature, both beasts formed by letters that make up the following Persian verse by Fariduddin ‘Aṭṭār: ‘To kill the evil soul in the body is not the work of the secular prince, [while] to tear into pieces the snake in the cradle is the work of Ḥeydar’, that is, the work of ‘Alī the lion (*ḥeydar*).[55] This passage, referring to a well-known Persian tradition about ‘Alī, who as a baby once overcame a snake approaching his cradle, reappears in an almost identical panel found in the Etnografya Musei in Ankara, presumably made for a Bektāshī *tekke* in the capital (Figure 57b). The same verse is here repeated in a straightforward version inside an ornamental cartouche attached to a krater in the lower right corner, probably meant to clarify the calligraphic riddle. The verses make it clear, in short, that the scene of combat represents ‘Alī as a lion (*ḥeydar*), whose task is to kill the evil elements in the human soul, represented by the dragon.



Figure 57a Calligraphic panel, *levha*, dated 1210 AH/1795–6 AD from a Bektāshī *tekke*, the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich, cat. no. 31–7-2. After Annemarie Schimmel, 'Calligraphy and Ṣūfīsm in Ottoman Turkey', in R. Lifchez (ed.), *The Dervish Lodge*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 242–252, fig. 12.1.

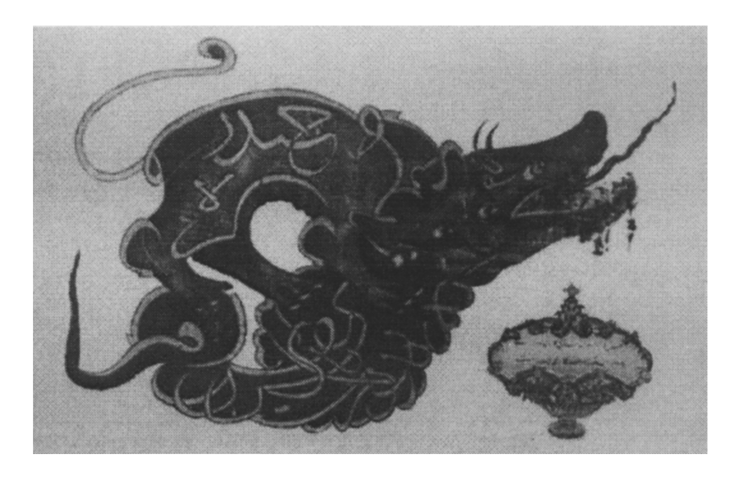


Figure 57b A panel almost identical to the one in plate 57a presumably made for a Bektāshī *tekke* in the capital, the Etnografya Musei in Ankara, no. 8170. After Nejat Diyarbekirli, *Baṣlangicindan bugüne Türk sanati*, Ankara, Türkiye iṣ Bankasi, 1993, p. 202.

To conclude, the emphasis given in Bektāshī calligraphy to a human face consisting of 'Alī's name in mirror image, as well as its frequent application to the face of 'Alī's symbol, the lion, is common among Bektāshī calligraphers who thus express the idea that the blessed face of 'Alī is the

supreme manifestation of God. When the name of ʻAlī is used to construct the face of a lion, his esoteric dimension is emphasised in the purest way.[56] The typical merger of Ḥurūfī ideas and pro-ʻAlī tendencies, already apparent in the calligraphic lion of the mid fifteenth-century scroll, seems to have acquired an even stronger emphasis in the Bektāshī versions, where the genre developed into a calligraphic manifestation of deeply esoteric meaning.

The artists working on the calligraphic lion in Mehmet II's scroll and the Bektāshī versions were all basically influenced by the Ḥurūfī concept regarding the letters of the alphabet as the external manifestation of the Divine Word. This aspect of Ḥurūfī thought was also the basis for the dynamic development of zoomorphic calligraphy using other animal forms as well, mainly falcons and birds of various species, already found, together with the calligraphic lion, in the scroll commissioned by Mehmet II in 862 AH/1458 AD (Figure 58).[57]

Calligraphic lions in Iran and its Indian offshoots

Similar Ḥurūfī and Ḥurūfī-influenced concepts were probably also behind the adoption of zoomorphic calligraphy in Iran, an event documented in a

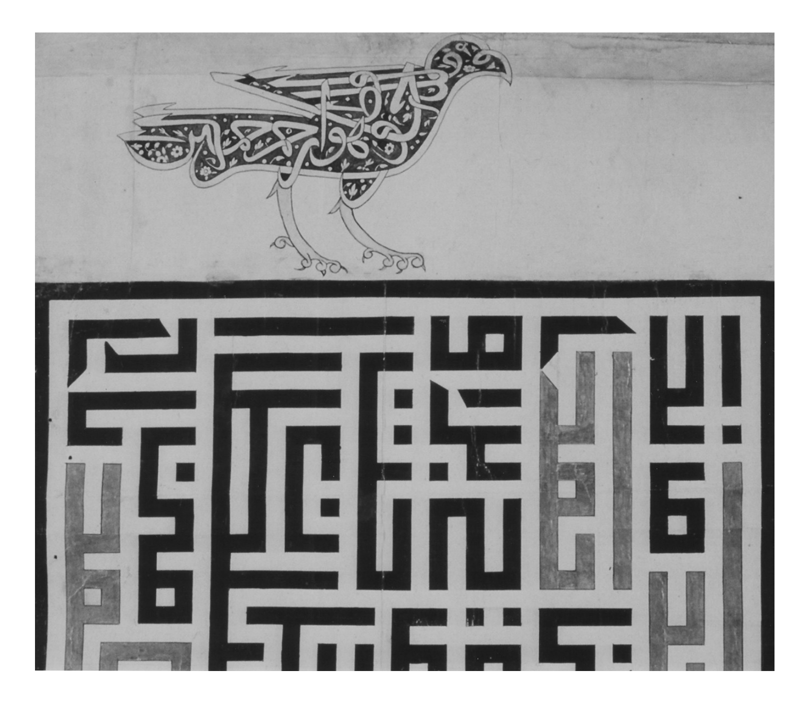


Figure 58 Calligraphic bird in scroll of Mehmet II, dated 862 AH/1458 AD, Istanbul, Topkapi Serai Library, EH. 2827. Courtesy of the Topkapi Serai Library.

treatise by Qāḍī Aḥmad b. Mīr Munshī, dedicated around 1015 AH/1606 AD to Shāh ʻĀbbās and to his Qizilbāshī official, Farhād-Khān Qaramānlū. The genre of calligraphic animals was invented, Qādi Aḥmad says, in the city of Herāt, where the style was first practised by a certain Maulānā Maḥmūd Chapnivī ('the left-handed'), whose *nom de plume* was Majnūn. As Qāḍī Aḥmad puts it, this artist 'invented the style of writing in which combinations of letters formed images of men and beasts ... both the figures and the writing executed with perfect skill and charm'.[58] Since Maulānā Maḥmūd was a contemporary of Ḥoseyn Bāyqarā Mīrzā and of Bābur,[59] and later also worked under the patronage of the Safavid prince Sam Mīrzā, it is not possible to determine when exactly his new calligraphic enterprise began, nor can one define the exact calligraphic and contextual nature of his zoomorphic works or whether they included lions.

In fact, the earliest known instances of calligraphic lions in Iran and its Indian offshoots were executed only after the mid sixteenth century; that is, under the Shīʻī regime of the Safavids to whom veneration of ʻAlī was natural. Among these examples, the most complete in terms of calligraphic structure, all done on single-sheet pages, are the following: the calligraphic lion on fol. 46a of an album in the Istanbul University Central Library, FY.1426 (Figure 59), attributed to Maḥmūd Nīshāpūrī (d. 971 AH/1563 AD), the favourite calligrapher of Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 931–7 AH/1524–88 AD); the calligraphic lion in the Hans P. Kraus Collection (Figure 60); a calligraphic lion published as lot 237 in Sotheby's sale catalogue of April 1979 (Figure 61); a calligraphic lion published as lot 288 in the Hôtel Drouot sale catalogue of December 1994 (Figure 62); and a calligraphic page in the L.A. Mayer Memorial Museum for Islamic Art in Jerusalem, Cal. 63, signed by Muḥammad Bāqir (Figure 63).

All five pages (Figures 59–63) present a calligraphic lion in profile, striding triumphantly from left to right, the front inner leg stretched out in the air, and the tail curling over the rump and back. Except for their tails, all the lions are constructed by an inscription in Arabic, which in the cursive flow of its letters penetrates the surface of the body. Starting at the lion's head and concluding along the rump and hindquarters, the inscription consists of two rhyming couplets, calling on Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, ʻAlī Ibn-e Abī Ṭālib, as follows:

> Call upon ʻAlī, who manifests wondrous things,
> You'll find he is your succour in times of distress
> Every worry and preoccupation will be removed
> By your sainthood, O ʻAlī, O ʻAlī, O ʻAlī.

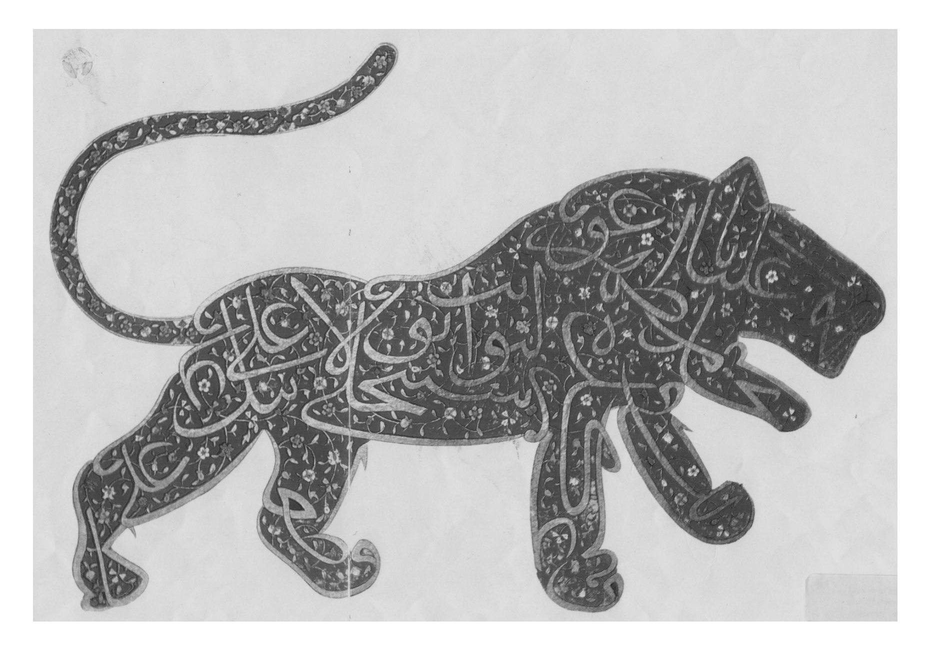


Figure 59 Calligraphic lion carrying the invocation to ʿAlī, in *thuluth*, fol. 46a of an album in Istanbul, University Central Library, FY.1426, attributed to Maḥmud Nishāpūrī (d. 971 AH/1563 AD), Safavid, midsixteenth century. After Abdelkebir Khatibi and Muḥammad Sijelmassi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1976, pp. 132–133.

nādi ʿaliyyan muẓhira l-ʿajā'ib
tajidhu ʿawnan laka fī l-nawā'ib
kullu hammin wa-gammin sayanjalī
biwilāyatika yā ʿAlī yā ʿAlī yā ʿAlī

This invocation formula, which relies on the exalted position of ʿAlī as the supreme active agent of God, has been known practically everywhere in Iran and the Indian subcontinent since at least the first Safavid ruler, Shāh Ismāʿīl I (r. 908–30 AH/1502–24 AD).[60] The latter used it on the early coins minted at his orders, presumably as a deliberate means to propagate his *ghulāt* beliefs in ʿAlī's divinity;[61] one example is a silver coin in the British Museum, struck at Shāh Ismāʿīl's orders in Kāshān, in 928 AH/1521–2 AD (Figure 64).[62]

On the early Safavid coins, then, the precedence of Muḥammad was decidedly overshadowed by ʿAlī's pre-eminence, establishing his exalted position as the supreme active agent of God. Struck by Shāh Ismāʿīl I on his official coins, the formula soon became popularised everywhere. It was probably first imitated by the leading Qizilbāshī Turkmen warriors

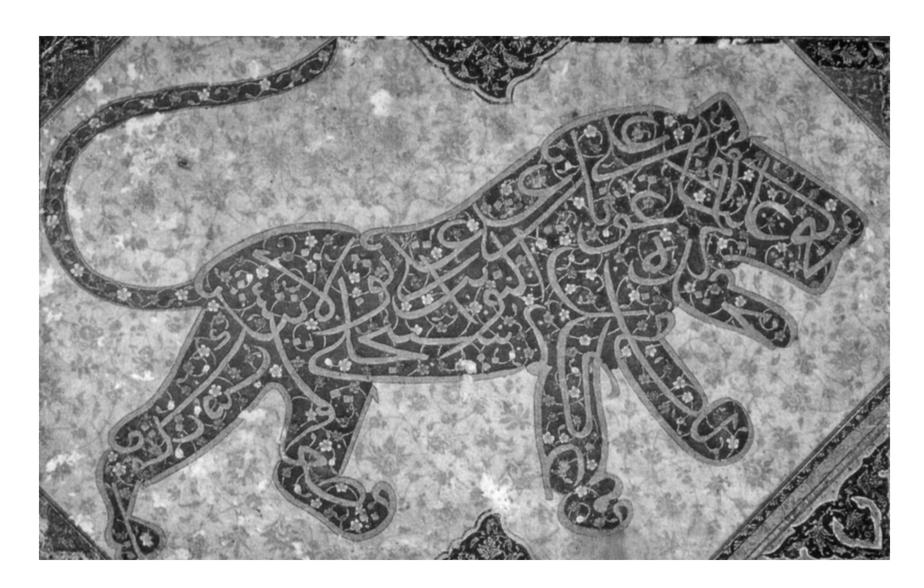


Figure 60 Calligraphic lion carrying the invocation to ʿAlī, in *thuluth* (12.5 x 19.7 cm), Hans P. Kraus Collection, attributed by Grube to late sixteenth-century Persia. After Ernst J. Grube, *Islamic Paintings in the Collection of Hans P. Kraus*, New York, H. P. Kraus, 1972, colour plate no. XXXV.

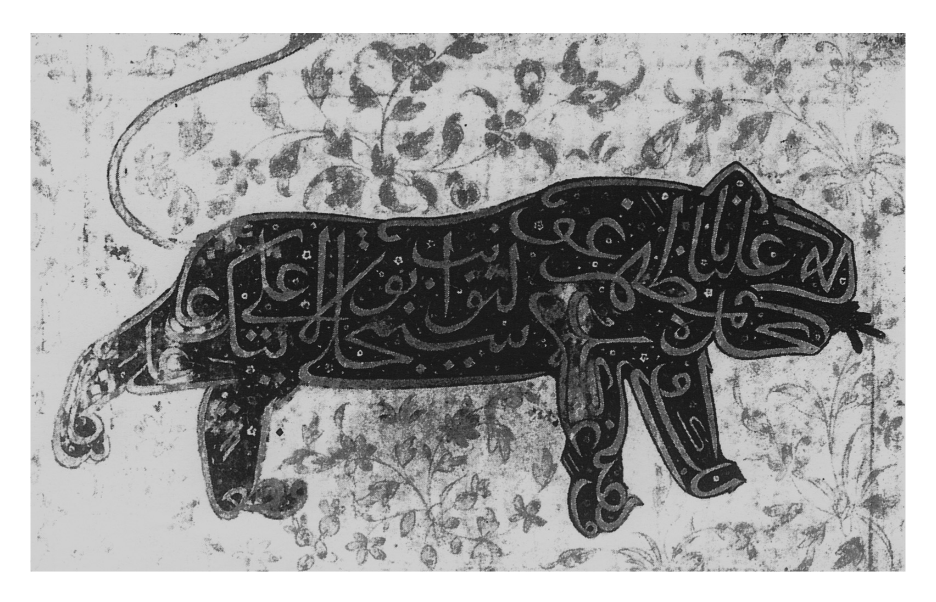


Figure 61 Calligraphic lion carrying the invocation to ʿAlī, in *thuluth*. After Sotheby's sale catalogue, April 1979, lot 237, pp. 111, 114, where it is regarded as Turkish and the script is wrongly identified as *naskh*.



Figure 62 Calligraphic lion carrying the invocation to ‘Alī, in *thuluth*. After Hôtel Drouot sale catalogue, December 1994, lot 288.

and courtiers, who used it on official signet seals, made in emulation of the Ismā‘īl coins and representing the official state level.[63] The way was open for diffusion throughout Iran, where the prayer to ‘Alī soon became commonly used on talismanic objects, mainly stone and glass plaques used as pendants,[64] and also on medicinal magic bowls, battle standards, spearheads, coats of chainmail and funerary art objects.[65] The invocation applied on the sum of objects just described surely had magical properties as well.[66] Similar notions were probably attached to the invocation formula when it was used on items of material culture made of more expensive materials.[67]

Apart from the examples based on popular beliefs among rich and poor, the invocation formula was also frequently written on a single-sheet page used by calligraphers for a lettering exercise (*mashq*) and as a calligraphic specimen (*qit‘a*). Although sometimes made for teaching purposes, these single-sheet calligraphies were mainly intended to give pleasure, indeed often compiled in luxurious albums, to enlightened royal and other official patrons in the Safavid and Indian courts. All written in *nasta‘liq*, the script that enjoyed particular favour among Persian calligraphers, such single-sheet works, which naturally contained other familiar formulas as well, represent a general trend among calligraphers in their artistic experiments and were often recognised as a test of ability.[68] Examples of this practice are two specimens from Safavid Iran, both carrying the same prayer to ‘Alī; one



Figure 63 Calligraphic lion carrying the invocation to 'Alī signed by Muḥammad Bāqir, Jerusalem, L.A. Mayer Memorial Museum for Islamic Art, Cal. 63. Deccan, between 1006 AH/1597 AD and 1024 AH/1615 AD. After Rachel Hasson, *The Art of Arabic Calligraphy*, Jerusalem, L.A. Mayer Memorial Museum for Islamic Art, 1995, no. 55.

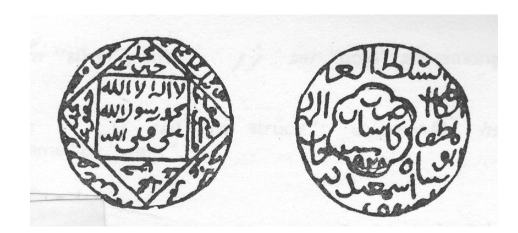


Figure 64 Silver coin of Shāh Ismā'īl I, carrying the invocation to 'Alī, Kashan, 928 AH/1521–2 AD. After Richard Plant, *Arabic Coins and How to Read Them*, London, Seaby's Numismatic Publications, 1980, pp. 95–96.

is a single album page signed by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabrīzī (Figure 65),[69] active during the sixteenth century, and the other is signed by his celebrated pupil, Mīr 'Imād al-Ḥasanī (Figure 66),[70] who during the 1560s received from his teacher the accolade of master calligrapher.

These and other calligraphic exercises represented an artistic challenge used to demonstrate virtuosity, measured against models of the past. In fact, such repeated tests of scribal skills may have urged some of the leading calligraphers to extend their repertoires by using similar avowed formulas to construct zoomorphic forms, even if only for the sake of exhibiting extra



Figure 65 Album page carrying the invocation to ʿAlī, in *nastʿaliq*, calligraphy by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabrīzī, Qazvin or Isfahan, mid-sixteenth century. After Hôtel Drouot sale catalogue, November 1991, lot. 175.

virtuosity. It is in this vein, then, that exercises on the specific invocation formula calling on ʿAlī would lead calligraphers of the Safavid period to apply its lettering to a lion, the obvious symbol of ʿAlī to whom this particular formula is dedicated (Figures 59–63).

In all five examples the lion appears as a monumental beast dominating a rectangular, horizontally laid page. All the lions walk from left to right, heads raised, mouths wide open and tails curling over the rump. The entire body apart from the tail is constructed and decorated in all of them by the cursive flow of the *thuluth* script, and in all but the Kraus example, which is more complex but belongs to the same tradition, the interplay between the Arabic characters and the lion's limbs that they construct is almost identical.

Thus, in all instances, the invocation to ʿAlī starts at the top centre of the lion's profile, where the unit created by the *nūn* and *alif* of the first word, *nād*, is enveloped by the third letter, *dād*, drawn upside down to make the ear. The four letters of the following word, *ʿAlīyyan*, and those of the next word, *muẓhira*, appear along two rows below, with *muẓhira* under the first two words. This word starts behind the lion's open jaws, as if to say that



Figure 66 Album page carrying the invocation to ʼAlī, in nastʻaliq, calligraphy by Mīr ʻImād al-Ḥasani, fol. 54b of St Petersburg Album (*Mirzā Mahdi Muraqqa*ʻ), compiled between 1160 AH/1747 AD and 1172 AH/1759 AD in Safavid Iran. After Yury A. Petrosyan et al (eds.), *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa*ʻ, Milan, Leonardo Arte, 1996, pl. 134.

ʻAlī's miracles, activated through the pious invocation of the divine name, are ready to be made manifest by words pronounced by the lion's tongue. The next two words, *al-ʻajāʼib* and *tajidhu*, make up the shapes of the lion's nose and lower lip, respectively. The nostril of the Jerusalem lion is indicated by a rhombic dot designating the letter-pointing below the *jīm* of *al-ʻajāʼib*, which in the other cases is shown by a flower placed inside rather than below the letter. This difference, indeed diverging from the norms of the original group, enabled me to affiliate the Jerusalem lion to the Deccan, where zoomorphic calligraphies likewise carrying the invocation formula to ʻAlī in the *thuluth* style are, like here, characterised by the preference to use both diacritical and vowel signs throughout the calligraphic composition so that they may articulate the formula constructing the beast as clearly as possible, perhaps even with the view that the inherent talismanic power would thus make it more efficacious.[71]

With the following word, *ʻawnan*, the calligraphers of all but the Kraus lion go back to the upper part of the head, dividing the word into two successive pairs of letters, the first at the back of the head and the second, written upside down, forming a curve along the nape. The next words,

laka and *fī*, make up the curving lines of the lion's inner forefoot. The front line of this foot is formed by the *alif* of the next word, *al-nawā'ib*, which terminates in two parallel horizontal rows behind the lion's neck. The outer, stationary forefoot is composed of the words *kullu hammin wa-gammin*, while the final *yā* of *sayanjalī* runs in broad horizontal curves along the lower part of the stomach. Finally, in all the images except the Kraus, the triple exclamation *yā ʿAlī* begins and ends at the outer, striding hind leg, the three *yā* making, respectively, the leg, the thigh and the rump. In all of them, the first two *ʿAlī*s are intermingled with the *tā* and *kāf* of *biwilāyatika*, spread out over the lion's hindquarters. The last *ʿAlī* is inscribed on the outer hind leg and also forms its front line by a long stroke of the final *yā*.

After the invocation, a personal exclamation is made by each of the five scribes along the lion's hind legs. The inner hind leg is always formed by the word *wa-ṭaʿ*, calling for total submission to the divinity; the foot and toe of the outer hind leg are formed by the word *kātib*. In the Kraus lion the word *kātib* is followed by the name of the calligrapher, *Qāsim*, with the *qāf* and *alif* making the back of the hind leg and the *sīn* and *mīm* written in reverse along the hindquarters. Additionally, the Jerusalem lion is distinctive, its foot and toe formed by the word *tā'ib* instead of *kātib*, a variation that may add to the understanding of the iconographical meanings carried by this picture (p. 148). The five pages also differ in terms of the specific rendering of some of the letters,[72] the use of diacritical signs and vocalisation marks for vowels[73] and the quality of execution.[74]

These differences, which I analysed in an earlier publication,[75] enabled me to draw a kind of 'genealogical line' within the general process of repetition and modification, which showed that all five examples were presumably derived from a single calligraphic prototype, perhaps best represented, if not initiated, by the calligraphic lion of Shāh-Maḥmūd Nīshāpūrī.[76]

Taking the Nīshāpūrī lion as a point of departure (Figure 59), the next in chronology is probably the one in the Kraus collection (Figure 60) whose calligrapher, named Qāsim, could be identified with Mīr Qāsim, a native of Astarābād, who, according to Qāḍī Aḥmad, 'wrote excellently, and tried to combine the styles of writing'.[77] This in itself could indicate the inventive nature of the works made by this calligrapher, perhaps according with the modifications apparent in the construction of the Kraus lion. As may be further deduced from Qāḍī Aḥmad's treatise, Mīr Qāsim, also known as Maulānā Qāsim, was employed at the court of Shāh Ṭahmāsp more or less at the same time as Nīshāpūrī, which may explain the 'genealogical connection'

between the calligraphic lions of these two great court calligraphers. In about 1544, Mīr Qāsim left Iran, accompanying Humāyūn to India, where he later served under Akbar.[78] One could probably just as well identify the specific Qāsim who signed the Kraus lion with yet another calligrapher bearing the same name who was active in the period. This one, according to Qāḍī Aḥmad, was called Maulānā Qāsim Shāhdishāh, a recognised calligrapher who 'prepared elegant samples of calligraphy (*qiṭ'a*)'.[79]

Both Nīshāpūrī and Qāsim may also have felt that the use of the invocation formula to design the figure of a lion would best suit the common epithet of 'Alī. Probably influenced by the general trend among great calligraphers to experiment with lettering exercises (*mashq*s), their calligraphic lions may undoubtedly have also been connected with Ḥurūfī-oriented trends dealing with the virtues and properties of the letters of the alphabet, also claiming that God's creatures can be represented by these letters because they are the supreme manifestation of God Himself (see above, note 15). Ḥurūfīsm indeed was the first recorded *ghulāt* movement to enjoy a wide following among the Qizilbāshīs, that is, among those taking a prominent part in the Safavid revolution led by Shāh Ismā'īl I.[80] In this respect, one may recall that Mīr Qāsim himself was a native of Astarābād, where Ḥurūfīsm first arose (see above note 24).

In particular, the calligraphic lions made by Nīshāpūrī and Qāsim were probably connected rather with an offshoot of Ḥurūfīsm, a trend called Nuqţaviya, derived from *nuqţa* (point),[81] which preserved the basic principles of the Ḥurūfīs while adding a more pronounced emphasis on the transmigration of souls. As recalled, this process of metempsychosis corresponds to one's own virtues and sins, and it may thus apply to 'Alī's virtues, represented by a lion.[82]

The Nuqţavī trend indeed had an impact in the earlier years of Shāh Ṭahmāsp's reign, more or less at the time when Shāh-Maḥmud Nīshāpūrī as well as Mīr or Maulānā Qāsim may have made their calligraphic lions. In view of the special influence the Nuqţavī leaders later had on 'Abbās I (995–1038 AH/1587–1629 AD)[83] as on his generals and high government officials, the 'genealogical line' of calligraphic lions, first established at the court of Shāh Ṭahmāsp, probably continued flourishing at court.

However, in 1002 AH/1593 AD, 'Abbās embarked on a policy of ferocious suppression of the Nuqţavīs,[84] causing many Nuqţavīs to flee to India. A mid nineteenth-century calligraphic head from India, with 'Alī's name inscribed in mirror image (Figure 67), may in fact show how deep were the roots of Nuqţavī-inspired figurative calligraphies expressing the veneration of 'Alī.[85]

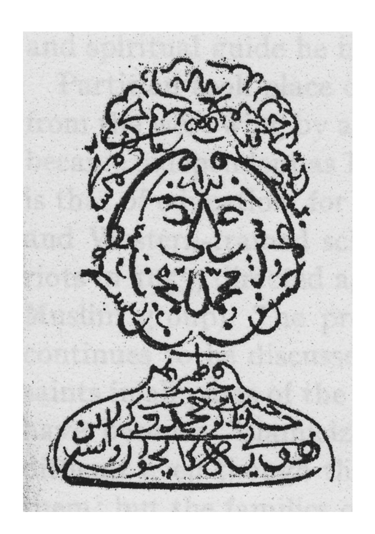


Figure 67 A calligraphic head by Bahādur Shāh Zafar, *c.* 1857, carrying in mirror image the names of ‘Alī, Muḥammad, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥoseyn. Lahore, National Museum. After Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in India and Pakistan*, Leiden, Brill, 1982, p. 17, fig. 16.

The Nuqṭavī heresy in India, the Deccan in particular, was an urban religious movement adhered to by poets, literate craftsmen and artists, among whom were probably those who made the calligraphic lions of Sotheby, Drouot and Jerusalem (Figures 61–63).

The Indian origin of the three is evident mostly in the background designs, which are unknown in Safavid Iran, but are typical of the art of its contemporary neighbours in the Deccan.[86] As a result of the artistic perspectives emerging in the new cultural milieu, the changes undergone by the Safavid prototype are already apparent in the Sotheby and Drouot lions, but they are reflected with much greater originality in the Jerusalem case, where the local pictorial approach allowed the artist to introduce a new iconographical context for the traditional calligraphic enigma (Figure 63).[87]

Itself covered by shimmering gold, on which the inscription is drawn in bright green letters, the lion is here surrounded by seven worshipping angels that enhance its prominent position by carrying flaming trays, some of which pour over the lion, while others are offered to him. Hence, a compositional association is immediately evoked with the well-known iconography in traditional *mi‘rāj* paintings; the sublime level of a heavenly journey, traditionally reserved for Muḥammad, however, is here given to the latter’s cousin and son-in-law, indeed an unprecedented creation, evidently made under Shī‘ī sponsorship.[88]

As shown in my former publication of this page, its unusual configuration was probably inspired by earlier artistic attempts to glorify ʿAlī in which the Prophet, on his nocturnal ascent to heaven, is shown opposite a fierce lion representing ʿAlī, to whom he presents his seal ring.[89] An early example of this new iconography, perhaps the earliest one of a long list of such *miʿrāj* paintings in Safavid Iran as well as in the Deccan,[90] appears on a single detached page in the Free Library in Philadelphia, Lewis P51 (Figure 68).[91]

On the Jerusalem page, the central figure of Muḥammad is omitted to make room for the lion, and the content inscribed on the latter in fact implies that the traditional position of the Prophet was here given to ʿAlī, represented by his supreme symbol, the lion, here embedded in golden brilliance.[92] The shimmering effect created on the Jerusalem lion by the lustrous gold and by the bright green outlining its calligraphy[93] differentiates it from the other calligraphic beasts in the Nīshāpūrī group, where letters in gold are inscribed against a deep blue body (Figures 59–62). Hence, one may define the Jerusalem picture as an icon, in which the lion's distinguished



Figure 68 The *miʿrāj* episode, the Free Library in Philadelphia, Lewis P51, attributed by the present author to the early Safavid school in Tabriz. Courtesy of the Free Library in Philadelphia.

bearing, as compared to the decorative luxury characterising the Nīshāpūrī group, has finally been transformed from a purely calligraphic exercise into a religious image.

This approach of deep piety is also aparent by the artist's personal avowal that follows the invocation constructing the lion; for this artist chose the religious idiom *al-tâʻib* (repentant) instead of *al-kâtib* (scribe), which was commonly used by court calligraphers. The conceptual unity between text and picture can be taken as an indication that both were designed by the same artist, Muḥammad Bâqir, whose signature appears below.

To conclude, the Jerusalem lion was evidently impelled by extreme Shī'ī tendencies penetrating the Deccan, a significant stronghold of the Shī'ī faith.[94] It is so strongly charged with spiritual connotations that one can safely assume that the common epithet 'the lion of God' was conceived here at the deepest religious level. The whole refers to 'Alī's metaphysical apotheosis, experienced by his mystical symbol, the lion. The artist thus invented an enigmatic compositional framework in which 'Alī's symbol is raised to the topmost level of sacredness.

Notable in this respect are the writings of Rizā Qulī Khān-Hidāyat, a follower of the Nuqṭavīyya in India, who stressed the belief in a process of metempsychosis corresponding to one's virtues and sins.[95] Obviously also applicable to 'Alī's virtues represented by a lion, these esoteric beliefs finally bring us back to the very beginning of the present study, where the words of the fourteenth-century author Ibn Qayyim, quoted from his *Kitāb al-rûḥ*, refer to those espousing transmigration (*mutanasikha*), claiming that 'every spirit goes to the body of an animal most similar to the particular characteristics acquired by that spirit during its lifetime . . . . The *mutanasikha* say that the lion-like soul is going to a lion's body.'[96]

Notes

1. Smith and Haddad 1981, pp. 58–59; quoting from Ibn Qayyim (1357/1938), pp. 138, 166.
2. On ʻAlī's epithet 'the Lion of God', see Vaglieri, *EI2*.
3. The following discussion of the Topkapi calligraphic lion is a revised and expanded version of the analysis I published earlier as a short appendix (IV) in Shani 2005, pp. 398–400.
4. Considering that the letter *yā* in *'Alī* is extended by a tail ending in a dragon's head, the special position given to the word *'Alī* gains further meaning, for, when viewed as the scroll format demands, it might signify the contrast between ʻAlī at the top and the dragon facing downward at the bottom. It would thus emphasise the lion's movement upward in a way that may symbolise ʻAlī's most elevated status *vis-à-vis* the dragon's low status.

5. Mutahharī 1981, pp. 67–68, note 42, referring to a tradition in Muḥibb al-Tabarī's *al-Riyāḍ 'l-naḍirah*.
6. Schimmel 1987, pp. 350–356, esp. p. 355.
7. Schimmel 1990, p. 98. See Nicholson 1967, p. 209, note 94.
8. Schimmel 1987, pp. 350–356. Note the statement in the Epistle of Maulānā Sulṭān-'Alī Mashhadī (d. 926 AH/1520 AD): 'The head of the *'ayn* is like the *Ṣād* and a horseshoe, and has no other shape, for it is the "eye" of 'Alī's name': Minorsky 1959, p. 120.
9. Considering the obvious formal connection between the shapes of *ţa* and *Ṣād*, one may recall the statement by Sulţān-'Alī Mashhadī (note 8), this time with reference to the diacritical dot placed inside the *ţâ* of *Ṭālīb* as representing 'Alī's eye, to be here connected with the letter *Ṣād*.
10. For the Ḥurūfī movement and its founder, Faḍullāh, see Gibb 1958, pp. 337–342; Browne 1898, pp. 61–94; idem 1920, pp. 365–375, 449–452; Inalcik 1973, pp. 190–195; Burrill 1974, pp. 242–246.
11. Regarding Ḥurūfī trends in Turkey, particularly in the Ottoman capital Edirne prior to the conquest of Constantinople, with Persian missionaries at Mehmet's palace, see Inalcik 1973, p. 193; Algar 1993, pp. 41–54.
12. Gibb 1958, p. 61, note 2.
13. Gibb 1958, pp. 381–383. See Birge 1937, pp. 58–62, 148ff; Algar 1993, p. 47; Inalcik 1973, p. 193.
14. Birge 1937, p. 149. See Bashir 2000, pp. 289–308; idem 2002, p. 177.
15. This idea is derived from the Qur'ānic passage 'We have indeed created man in the best of forms' (95:4), interpreting the 'best forms' as referring to God's own form and nature: Birge 1937, p. 150; Bashir 2000, p. 299 and note 66.
16. Browne 1898, p. 71.
17. The idea is connected in their writings with sūra 28 verse 88, which reads: 'Everything doth perish except His face': Gibb 1958, p. 362 and Schimmel 1990, p. 106.
18. Bashir 2000, p. 295 and note 38. See also below, note 24.
19. Bashir 2000, p. 296 and note 43. See Browne 1898, p. 82.
20. Bashir 2000, p. 296, note 47.
21. See note 4.
22. Bashir 2005, pp. 30, 58–59; idem 2002, p. 178. See also above, note 10.
23. Bashir 2005, p. 59; idem 2002, p. 176, note 46.
24. The Ḥurūfī movement, founded by Faḍlallāh of Astarābād (d. 1393), was propagated first in Khorasan in the late fourteenth century but was later shifted to Azerbaijan, where its founder, Faḍlallāh, was soon put to death by Timur's son, Miranshāh. The shrine erected for Faḍlallāh at Alanjaq kept his followers in the region, where their activities continued to flourish until 1421–2.
25. Bashir 2000, esp. p. 292.
26. See Minorsky 1954, pp. 271–297, esp. p. 281.

27. Rogers 1995, p. 258, no. 184, based on Richard 1989, pp. 89–93. See Levenson 1991, cat. no. 90.
28. For example, in 1453–4 Abu’l-Mūzaffar Jahān Shāh built the Darb-i Imām in Isfahan, also commissioning the construction of the Muzaffariyya in his capital, Tabriz.
29. For another account of a calligrapher moving from Jahān Shāh’s court to that of Mehmet II, see Richard 1989, pp. 89–93.
30. Inalcik 1973, p. 193.
31. Even if al-Tabrīzī’s signature elsewhere in the scroll is not a definitive indication that the calligraphic lion is his work, circumstances in Tabriz may nevertheless allow one to propose that he may have been a significant initiator of its making, bringing to the Ottoman court of Mehmet II the Shī‘ī-oriented Ḥurūfī doctrines prevalent at the court of Jahān Shāh, the Qarāquyūnlū ruler in Tabriz.
32. Köprülü 1993, p. 121, note 237.
33. Babinger 1978, p. 491.
34. Regarding Ḥurūfī doctrines adopted at that time by the Bektāshīs in Anatolia and the Balkans, see Inalcik 1973, p. 193; Algar 1993; Mélikoff 1982, pp. 379–395; Birge 1937, pp. 46, 74, 193.
35. Regarding Ḥurūfī trends in Turkey, see note 11.
36. Birge 1937, p. 193; Gibb 1958, pp. 343–368.
37. Algar 1993, p. 54 and note 70. See Schimmel 1974, pp. 106–108.
38. See Burrill 1974, pp. 239–289 (esp. p. 244); Birge 1937, p. 193; Goodwin 1997, p. 150.
39. The number of Janissaries under Mehmet II indeed increased significantly: Babinger 1978, p. 448.
40. Goodwin 1997, p. 28, also illustrated on p. 64. See Matkovski 1976, p. 128, figs. 1, 2.
41. For other Anatolian and Mesopotamian examples, see Öney 1969, pp. 43–67, figs. 40, 46, 48, 54–6, 64; Gierlichs 1993.
42. Lions with a tail terminating in a dragon’s head originated in the mythological or, rather, metaphysical concept regarding the solar eclipse as a supernatural phenomenon caused by a monster that swallows the sun. For a detailed study of the subject, see Hartner 1938, pp. 113–154.
43. In Islamic literature the nodes are frequently listed with the seven planets and the zodiac; e.g. Abū Ma’shar’s work on the Great Conjunctions, where the author discusses the dragon’s head and tail and their signs of exaltations, Gemini and Sagittarius.
44. The same motif appears on the Wade Cup in the Cleveland Museum of Art: Hartner 1959, pp. 234–243. See Rice 1955, pp. 17–20, claiming the cup was made in northwest Iran, Azerbaijan or near the Caucasus, in the third decade of the thirteenth century.
45. As chief of state, Mehmet II strictly enforced the Sunnī doctrines of Islam, while in his private associations he had considerable sympathy for heretical ideas. This

kind of duality is well described by Goodwin 1997, p. 117, as 'the Janus-faced manner of the Ottomans, [whose faith was] both orthodox and mystical'.

46. When Bayezid II acceded to the throne, the librarian was accused of heresy and was finally condemned to death: Babinger 1978, pp. 493–494.
47. Gibb 1958, pp. 389–410, esp. p. 401.
48. Inalcik 1973, p. 190–193.
49. Regarding the militant character of Mehmet II, see Babinger 1978, p. 419 and Inalcik 1973, p. 30. See Tursun Beg 1978, p. 42.
50. On this conquest, see Babinger 1978, p. 90.
51. Inalcik, *EI2*, p. 978. See Babinger 1978, pp. 112–113, referring to an event occurring during the summer of 1454 by the tomb of Abū Ayyūb (Eyüp); the young conqueror Mehmet II was girded by the superior of the Mevlevi dervishes with the sword of the Emir Osman.
52. Regarding the mirror-writing, *musenna*, see *Art Treasures of Turkey, National Gallery of Art* 1966–68, p. 100, no. 177; Schimmel 1990, pp. 111–114; Welch 1979, p. 154.
53. The sword is also seen on the back of the camel that carries the coffin of 'Alī at the top of the painting, with the veiled figure leading the camel representing 'Alī.
54. See note 4.
55. Schimmel 1970, p. 31.
56. For similar calligraphic lions, also recent, see Massoudy 1981; Ferrier 1989, fig. 19; Mélikoff 1995, pp. 207–225, figs. 10, 12; Safadi 1978/1992, p. 136, fig. 155.
57. For a black-and-white reproduction of the Topkapi calligraphic bird, see Çagman and Tanindi 2005, ill. 18.
58. Minorsky 1959, pp. 132–133.
59. Schimmel 1990, p. 110.
60. Regarding a few pieces that may predate the Safavid period, see Shani 2005, pp. 398–400 (Appendix IV).
61. These beliefs were already crystallised during the extended exile of Ismā'īl's predecessors among the Turkic people in Anatolia, where this invocation formula had long been common, in particular among the Bektāshīs: Birge 1937, p. 138.
62. For more examples, see Plant 1980, pp. 95–96.
63. For examples, see Shani 2005, p. 355, note 418.
64. For examples, see Shani 2005, p. 357, note 425.
65. For examples, see Shani 2005, p. 357, notes 426–430.
66. For references regarding these beliefs, see Shani 2005, p. 358, note 431.
67. For examples, see Shani 2005, p. 358, note 432.
68. For references regarding this, see Shani 2005, p. 358, notes 434–435.
69. Published in Hôtel Drouot 1991, lot 175.
70. It is now in the St Petersburg Album (*Muraqqa'*): Akimushkin 1966, pp. 41–46. For other examples from Safavid Iran and the Indian subcontinent

presumably made by Persian calligraphers migrating to India, see Shani 2005, pp. 358–359, notes 440–442.

71. Shani 2005, pp. 370–371 and notes 463–466, where the Deccani affiliation is also applied to the Sotheby lion; for, despite having a flower instead of a dot under the *jîm* of *‘ajâ‘ib*, this lion otherwise shows a noted preference for diacritical and vocalising marks, which clearly distinguish it and the Jerusalem lion from the rest. It also looks much like the Jerusalem lion, in fact measuring almost the same (21 by 13 cm.). For further references, see endnote 66 above and endnote 72/73 below.
72. For example, the *hā* in the middle of the word *muẓihra* is drawn differently in each case.
73. The use of diacritical signs and vocalisation marks clearly distinguishes the Jerusalem and Sotheby lions from the rest, where they are usually indicated by a flower inserted inside the letter (e.g. the dot below the *jīm* of *al-‘ajā’ib*: Shani 2005, pp. 369–371). See also above, note 71.
74. For example, the rhythmic flow in the Jerusalem page is less elegant and less fluid than in the Nīshāpūrī, as if it was made by an artist who tried to copy directly either from a great master or from later imitations of old masterpieces. This presumed remoteness from the prototype may have led to a decline in quality.
75. Shani 2005, pp. 369–371.
76. Shani 2005, pp. 369–371.
77. Minorsky 1959, p. 91.
78. Minorsky 1959, p. 89, note 269.
79. Minorsky 1959, p. 138 (note 474), noting that this calligrapher was active in 950 AH/1543 AD.
80. This connection may also explain the Ḥurūfī imagery in the poetry of their leader, Shāh Ismā‘īl, writing under the pseudonym Khatā’ī: Minorsky 1939–42.
81. For references on the Nuqṭavīyya, see Shani 2005, pp. 361–366, notes 449–450.
82. See note 1.
83. We know, for example, that in the sixth year of his reign in Qazvin, Shāh ‘Ābbās established an intimate relationship with the Nuqṭavīs’ leader, dervish Khosrau, and was even initiated by him into the Nuqṭavīyya: Algar, *EI2*, pp. 114–117.
84. Alarmed by the potential for a full-scale Nuqṭavī insurrection, the Shāh instigated a massacre of Nuqṭavīs near Kashan, also imprisoning a number of Nuqṭavīs in Qazvin: Babayan 1996, p. 136, note 34.
85. Notable in this context is a saying by Naṣir Muḥammad ‘Andalib, a strictly Sunnī mystic in Delhi, that ‘Alī is written twice in the face: Schimmel 1990, p. 110 and note 186. For similar calligraphic heads, see Schimmel 1982, p. 17, fig. 16.
86. For a detailed analysis of the stylistic aspects, see Shani 2005, pp. 371–374.

87. The Jerusalem page is signed by Muḥammad Bāqir, identified by me as a Persian calligrapher from Kashan active in the Deccan between 1597 and 1615: Shani 2005, pp. 386–391.
88. One may add that the host of seven angels on the Jerusalem page perhaps represents the seven heavenly spheres, traditionally traversed by Muḥammad during his night journey to meet God, and the seven stages (*maqāmat*) along the Ṣūfī path, experienced by the individual in his spiritual *mi'rāj* toward communion with God: Samarrai 1968. See Shani 2005, pp. 374–380.
89. For this iconography, see Shani 2005, pp. 265–267, 291–350.
90. For a list of similar paintings in Safavid Iran and the Deccan in India, see Shani 2005, pp. 305–306, 375–376.
91. The Philadelphia page was attributed by me to the early Safavid school of Tabriz: Shani 2005, pp. 324–335.
92. The luminous gold that covers the symbol of 'Alī may be taken to refer to 'Alī as the carrier of the Divine Light, a mode of pietism connected with the Shī'ī belief dominating Safavid Iran and the Deccan: Rosenthal 1970, pp. 142–148. The impact of the Jerusalem lion as the carrier of the Divine Light is reinforced by the golden flames darting from the offerings on the dishes carried by the angels, as if the light embodied in the lion were transformed into the dishes' flashes of golden tongues.
93. The bright green script may be understood as an affirmation of 'Alī's supernatural power and knowledge of occult matters, often implied by this colour: Shani 2005, p. 281, note 89 and pp. 377–379.
94. As shown by Schimmel 1982, pp. 15–17, the first major Shī'ī communities in India were in the Deccan, introduced under the influence of Persian immigrants. See Hollister 1953, pp. 112–117.
95. Amoretti 1986, pp. 644–645.
96. See note 1.

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PART TWO

SHI'I RITUALS, PIOUS ARTEFACTS AND MATERIAL CULTURE

The Votive Image in Iranian Shi'ism

Ingvild Flaskerud

Introduction

IN PERSIAN, *NAZR KARDAN* MEANS 'TO vow' and 'to dedi-cate.'[1] In Iranian Shi'ism the vow is presented ultimately to God but through the intercession of holy personages, who are considered to act as mediators between God and human beings. A supplication may concern protection, healing, material and spiritual assistance in this life, and the safeguard of the souls of deceased friends and family members in the hereafter, as well as personal redemption. A supplication is accompanied by a promise. If the votary receives the requested protection, healing or assistance, he or she must meet the obligation made at the time of the vow and present an offering. The offering, or the gift, is called a *nazri*. The offering is typically a meal (*sofreh*) held in honour of saints, images, equipment for religious ceremonies and assembly halls, the performance of *ta'ziyeh*, charity or a pilgrimage to the benefactor's shrine.[2]

The use of votive images in contemporary Shi'i devotional practices has, however, yet to be systematically addressed.[3] There is a need to know what characterises the votive image, how votive images are employed during ritual performance and why images are regarded as effective and adequate vehicles for invoking favour and giving thanks. The votive images I introduce here are pseudo-portraits of holy personages, narrative images, representations of holy places and portraits of living and deceased members of the local community. They have been observed in ritual assembly halls, such as the courtyard of a home, a *hoseyniyeh*, a *fatemiyeh* or a shrine, in addition to street processions. The liturgical time is confined to mourning rituals during Moharram and Safar, *majles-e matam* and birthday celebrations (*mowludi*).[4]

Methodological challenges

Before discussing the characteristics of the votive image, its use in ritual performances and its function as invocation and thanksgiving, I would like to comment briefly on a few methodological challenges. The investigation of the characteristics of votive images cannot be based exclusively on an iconographic analysis because the genre has not developed any distinct votive iconography. Instead, votive images may share visual characteristics with the portraiture genre. Wall hangings used as mourning banners (*parcham*), depicting references to the battle at Karbala on a black background, are also used as votive images. The fact that they are mourning images may explain why they are popular as offerings and thanksgivings, as later discussed. In addition, the votive genre does not seem to have developed a standardised repertoire of terms, such as *nazri,* to identify an image as a votive image.[5] Many image-gifts are, however, labelled as *taqdimi,* offering (Figure 69); *waqf,* endowment (Figures 70 and 71 and Plate 7); and *hediyeh* or *ehdayi*, gift (Figures 71 and 72). A substantial number of these images are votive gifts, but not all. This knowledge has some implications also for the study of images that do not carry any precise caption identifying them as a gift (Figure 73). Such images could be votive gifts and should not be excluded from the study of votive images. Written historical sources to consult are



Figure 69 Wall hanging used in a private courtyard during Moharram. Text in lower frame: *Taqdimi Jawad Karmani 1338* (Offering from a man named Jawad Karmani, *c.* 1959 AD). © I. Flaskerud 1999.



Figure 70 Wall hanging used in a private *hoseyniyeh* during Moharram. Text below sword: *Waqf nemud khanum-e Sabagh beh hey' at Banevane Bushehri* (Endowment given by Mrs. Sabagh for the *hey'at* 'Ladies of Bushehr'). © I. Flaskerud 2002.

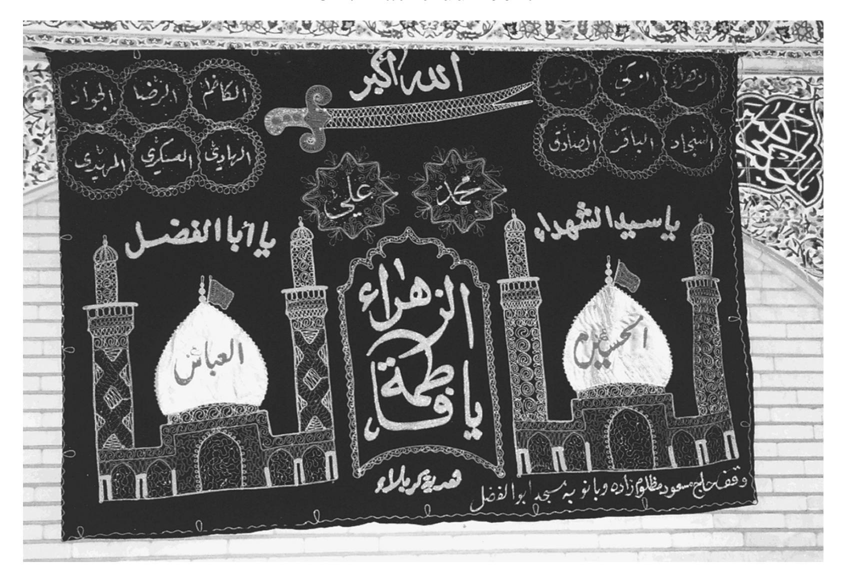


Figure 71 Wall hanging used in a shrine mosque during Moharram. Text bottom centre: *Hediyeh Karbala* (Gift from Karbala). Text bottom right: *Waqf Hajj Mazlumzadeh va banu beh masjed Abu al-Fazl* (Endowment from Hajj Mazlumzadeh and wife for the mosque Abu al-Fazl). Otherwise, the text praises God, as well as the 14 infallibles and Abu al-Fazl Abbas. © I. Flaskerud 2002.



Figure 72 Portable neon board used for street processions during Moharram. Text in upper frame: *Innama al-muminin ikhwa* (Truly, all believers are brothers). *Zanjir zanan-e Hey'at-e Motahed-e Jannesaran-e Abu al-Fazl* (The chain of *hey'at* the succeeding allies of Abu al-Fazl). *Ta'sis Shiraz 1327* (Established Shiraz 1948). Text in lower frame: *Hey'at-e Motahed-e Jannesaran-e Abu al-Fazl* (The succeeding allies of Abu al-Fazl, Shira). *Ehdayi tablo saziy-e Hajj Khalil Setayeshgar* (Gift from Hajj Khalil Setayeshgar). © I. Flaskerud 2002.

scarce. None of the assembly halls I have visited keep a record of the gifts they receive. Information about when a specific gift was presented, who presented it, the motivation behind it and to whom it was dedicated is obscured. This also makes it difficult to date the beginning of the custom. The study of Shi'i votive images should therefore be situated within the overall framework of a votum reciprocal process, and one should discuss concurrently iconography, captions and the context of display and observe



Figure 73 Wall hanging used in a private courtyard during commemoration ceremonies during Moharram. © I. Flaskerud 1999.

the image as part of a votive complex.[6] In addition, the researcher must depend on information provided by organisers of and visitors to rituals.

Characteristics of Shi'i votive images

The votive image, as a genre, belongs to a functional category. It is part of a reciprocal process related to invocation and thanksgiving. This reciprocal process is often reflected in references to a votary or a donor, a mediating saint, and to intervention. Here, the image itself is a trace of an intervention and may be introduced at either end of the votive process: at the beginning, to call upon the mediator, or at the end, as a thanksgiving. When the name of the donor is mentioned, this is typically placed in a frame on the lower margin of the image. The donor might be an individual, male or female, or a family (Figures 70 and 71). Occasionally captions also mention the recipient of the image, who might be a saint. In Plate 7, for example, the receiver of the endowment (*waqf*) is *Seyyed ol-Shohada*, the Lord of Martyrs; that is, Imam Hoseyn. Imam Hoseyn here takes the role of the benefactor who may act as mediator on behalf of an unmentioned votary. The Shi'i transactional dramaturgy is not confined to the reciprocal transaction between donor and benefactor, and occasionally a *hey'at* and a shrine are mentioned as receivers of image-gifts (see Figures 70 and 71). What would be the role of a *hey'at* in

the votum process? A *hey'at* is an association organised on a neighbourhood or occupational basis for the purpose of religious instruction and ritual celebration. According to the concept of intercession and redemption in Twelver Shi'ism, performing rituals is perceived as an effective way of achieving contact with the spiritual world. Annually performed mourning rituals organised by individuals and groups may gradually build up a reputation for being 'favourable' occasions for presenting a vow. The idea prevails that a vow presented on these occasions is likely to be rewarded. The role of the *hey'at* in the votum process is thus to create a rewarding opportunity for people to make a vow. This may justify the practice of donating offerings to associations organising rituals, instead of the actual mediating saint. A mosque may receive an image-gift for the same reason.

Some wall hangings are gifts purchased from pilgrimage sites, such as Karbala and Mashhad. The wall hanging in Figure 70 is a *Hediyeh Karbala,* 'Gift from Karbala', presented as an endowment from Hajj Mazlumzadeh and his wife for the mosque Abu al-Fazl Abbas. There are at least two different functions associated with pilgrimage sites in a votive process. A visit to a pilgrimage site may be the object of a votary's vow;[7] the purpose of pilgrimage is to pay respect to the saint buried at the site, and to seek his or her intercession. The journey is considered a pious act and is connected with religious merit (*savab*). An image purchased at a pilgrimage site may therefore be interpreted as evidence of a benefactor's successful mediation in granting the votary the opportunity to visit the shrine. In this case, the image functions as an ex-voto; the image is the votary's return gift to the saint for the fulfillment of a vow. On the other hand, the pilgrimage may be the votary's gift to the saint in return for the saint's intervention; in this case, the image functions as testimony of the votary's implementation of his or her obligation. Some shrine images, however, are simply souvenirs. They are brought home and presented as gifts to remind the pilgrim or donor of his or her personal experience. Several members of the local community may share the experience of visiting a particular shrine, and the souvenir may therefore also bring back memories of journeys to co-believers.

During mourning ceremonies and *mowludi*, ritual locations are often decorated with single portraits of living or deceased members of the local community; these portraits represent beneficiaries. Ritual locations are also decorated with pseudo-portraits of the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali, Imam Hoseyn and Abu al-Fazl Abbas. All these characters are generally perceived as mediators in Shi'ism. Being connected to a votum transaction, these single portraits depict the benefactor. Noteworthy is the characteristic pseudo-portrait of Abu al-Fazl Abbas (Figure 72), which also gives reference

to the event in which the mediator earned his role as an intercessor. Abu al-Fazl Abbas is portrayed alive, but wounded and thirsty, and his head is almost immersed in water. Here, the mediator is portrayed expressing the virtues for which he was bestowed with the honour of acting as a mediator. By comparison, Catholic votive images would rather depict the event in which the mediator is believed to have intervened. This particular image of Abu al-Fazl Abbas is exceptionally rich in references to a votive process. The caption states it is an *ehdayi*, gift, presented to the *Hey'at-e Motahed-e Jannesaran-e Abu al-Fazl*, 'the succeeding allies of Abu al-Fazl', established in Shiraz in 1327 AH solar/1948 AD. It was donated by a man referred to as Hajj Khalil Setayeshgar. By consulting captions and iconography we have thus identified a benefactor, a donor, a recipient of the gift and the reason why the benefactor may be able to be of assistance. In addition, a member of the *hey'at* revealed that the image had been donated the previous year, in 2001, by a father who presented it as an ex-voto, *nazri*, after the healing of his sick son through the mediation of Abu al-Fazl Abbas.

References to the event for which the saint was bestowed with the honour of acting as a mediator is a recurrent theme in visual narratives; see, for example, Figures 68, 72 and Plate 7. The iconography typically shows a wounded white horse with a tear flowing from its eye; the horse is carrying a saddle and bridle, but no horseman. Placed around the horse are a standard and other conventional attributes of Abu al-Fazl Abbas; that is, his arm, water bag and helmet. Through the use of a few core symbolic signs, the visual representation appeals to the viewers' memory of the event at Karbala. In these wall hangings, the event in which the mediators earned their power to act as intercessors is also mediated in calligraphy. In the marginal excerpts of the wall hanging in Plate 7 and Figure 72 one can read, from the right, via the top, to the left side:

> *Oftad dast-e rastam*
> *Khodaya ze peykaram*
> *Bar daman-e Hoseyn*
> *Beresan dast-e diagram*
>
> My right hand fell off
> O God, from by body
> In the lap of Hoseyn.
> Send the other hand.

This passage is taken from the *ta'ziyeh* episode describing the martyrdom of Abu al-Fazl Abbas.[8] In the marginal excerpts in Figure 68 can be

recognised the first lines from a famous 12-stanza elegy (*tarkibband*) about the martyrdom of Imam Hoseyn by Mohtasham Kashani (d. 1587):[9]

> *Baz in che shuresh ast*
> *Keh dar khalq-e ʿalam ast.*
> *Baz in che noheh che ʿaza*
> *Wa che matam ast.*
>
> Again, what is this revolt that is
> Among the people of the world?
> Again, what is this lament,
> This condolence and this mourning?

The three wall hangings also contain calligraphies praising Abu al-Fazl Abbas and Imam Hoseyn. In addition to portraits and narratives, wall-hanging gifts may show a prototypical shrine design, a dome flanked by two minarets (Figures 70 and 71 and Plate 7). Here, the grave, mosque and tent point symbolically to the martyrdom of two important mediating saints, Abu al-Fazl Abbas and Imam Hoseyn, the event in which they earned their position as mediators. The shrine also points to the cult of pilgrimage, an act often associated with vowing. Here, the mediating saints are also mentioned in calligraphies within the pictorial frame.

To sum up, images used as votive gifts may name the donor or votary and depict the beneficiary; they may also name or depict the benefactor. Shi'i votive images will not depict the event in which the saint intervened, but the event in which the saint earned his or her power to mediate.

The use of votive images during ritual performance

The leaders of rituals (*maddah*) are often approached by people in the community and requested to ask saints for intercession on their behalf. They request blessing from God to improve the health of named members of the local community, to safeguard the souls of named deceased members of the community and to encourage personal salvation. During rituals, the ritual leaders will invite the congregation to praise and greet God, the Prophet Mohammad and his descendants. Portraits of deceased individuals are often placed in ritual assembly halls to remind the congregation to request salvation and blessing on their behalf. Figure 70 depicts how a host has placed a photograph of his late father in juxtaposition with a wall hanging presented as an endowment. Sometimes an invocation will be sent for the portrayed in particular; otherwise the deceased is believed to benefit from the general flow of blessings believed to be generated by eulogies and prayers performed by the congregation. The mentioning of a donor's name

in wall hangings is connected to the same practice of bestowing blessings. During ritual performance, donors are not necessarily verbally recalled, but the mentioning of their names in the images' captions may represent them symbolically. People may thus, directly or indirectly, be included in the flow of praise and supplications presented in the ritual location where their gift is offered. In this case, wall hangings and photographs are related to the process of invocation, which is the first part of the votive process.

Private photographs are sometimes placed on the *menbar,* and in conjunction with the representations of shrines. The photograph in Plate 8 was taken at a *hoseyniyeh* and shows the portrait of a boy placed next to a temporarily constructed replica of Roqayyeh's shrine. The use of the portrait is here related to the first step in the votum process, the invocation. The mother hopes to heal her son's handicap through the intervention of the female child saint. The image's close proximity to the shrine of the mediating saint is supposed to enhance the healing effect of the supplications. The belief in the power of the representation of the shrine is grounded in the saint's reputation as a mediator. There seemed to be the hope, at least on the part of the mother, that Roqayyeh, a child who has experienced great suffering, will answer the call from another child in great distress. The belief in the power of the representation of the shrine is also grounded in the fact that the representation is composed of votive gifts for Roqayyeh.[10] The representation, made of votive gifts – some of which are invocations, others thanksgivings – is assumed to be invested with grace (*barakat*). This idea seems to be shared by other members of the community, who would touch gifts presented in the representation of the shrine to share in their *barakat*.[11] People approached the replica of the saint's grave to honour her, express devotional sentiments and present their supplication or thanksgiving.

The mother did not bring the son to the representation of the shrine but let him relax in the kitchen connected to the assembly hall. Instead, the boy was introduced to the saint through his portrait. One should be cautious, though, in clarifying the nature of a person's presence through visual representation in the context of Iranian Shi'ism. Conversations with mullahs and laypeople in the local community revealed the conviction that portraits can substitute people not because a portrait has the power to embody a person in an iconic manner, but because the image can stand for that person in a symbolic manner. In this manner, the portrait assists in the recollection of the portrayed, but not in making the portrayed present.[12] The juxtaposition of the boy's portrait with the representation of the shrine of Roqayyeh serves the purpose of calling Roqayyeh's attention to the boy,

and recollecting the sitter in the minds of the ritual performers requesting blessing. The positioning of the portrait may also have served yet a third function: to state a commitment. Betteridge has observed that someone who is seriously ill might bind himself or herself to the grating around the tomb at a shrine or *imamzadeh*.[13] She explains that the tying is a binding of the saint to pay attention to a request, as well as the initiation of a transaction binding the petitioner to the saint. This is an example of a clearly literal correlation between an action and its symbolic content and intention. The juxtaposition of the portrait at the representation of the shrine, I suggest, serves the same function, but in a symbolic manner.

In this case, the beneficiary's portrait is presented to the saint in combination with a votive complex. During the period the portrait was on display at the replica shrine, the mother made daily pilgrimages to the representation of the shrine. In addition, she offered her assistance in the organisation of the ceremonies, preparing beverages and food for the visitors. To participate in the decoration of ritual assembly halls and assist the host during ceremonies is perceived as religious, meritorious work (*savab*). Such work may be related to the votum process in the sense that it is perceived to support an invocation. The mother thus used various strategies of gift giving in order to present her invocation, to secure the adequate attention from the saint and raise sympathy for her cause. A single portrait was offered to introduce the son to the saint; it was placed in conjunction with the saint's shrine replica to call her attention to the request. By revisiting the representation of the shrine the mother reassured the saint of her commitment, and by having already performed religious work she testified to her sincerity. Any potential fulfilment of a request would be perceived to be a result of the combination of gifts, all of which served various purposes in the process. Here, a votive complex was arranged and presented by an individual; but in the votive process the mother's votive gifts to Roqayyeh were combined with gifts presented by other members of the local community, and her personal invocation became part of a joint communal effort to call on and praise the saint.

I suggested previously that the juxtaposition of the boy's portrait with the representation of Roqayyeh's shrine was motivated by belief in the object's mediating potential. This potential power was owing to the replica's composition, consisting of invocational gifts and thanksgivings. Are images also ascribed a mediating potential? Observations of people's behaviour before, during and after ritual performance suggest that they might be, both as invocational gifts and as ex-votos. During Moharram processions in 2002, the portable neon signboard representing Abu al-Fazl

Abbas, shown in Figure 71, was transported through the streets of Shiraz. This ritual procession was repeated every evening between the first and the ninth of Moharram, and then on the day of Ashura. Typically, many people would gather along the route to watch the procession. One evening I observed two chador-clad women parting from the crowd to approach it. The two women stroked the face of Abu al-Fazl Abbas with their hands and next crossed the same hands over their own faces; after having completed these movements, they returned to the watching crowd. In general, touching objects related to holy people is believed to secure the believer's blessing (*barakat*). A similar incident took place in a ritual assembly hall after a ceremony during Moharram in 2002. A young woman with a small child on her arm approached a wall hanging to stroke it with her hand; she then stroked her child with the same hand, and then herself. The wall hanging she touched was a calligraphy saying, *Ya qamr-e bani hashem*, 'Oh, Moon of bani hashem's clan', referring to Abu al-Fazl Abbas. The woman explained she had come to ask Abu al-Fazl Abbas for help on behalf of her small family. Her husband had recently been paralysed as a result of a motorcycle accident and could not support them; the little she earned, as an unskilled worker, was not enough to make ends meet.

It is not uncommon to see people approach images to touch them. Visitors to rituals are often unaware of the history of any particular image, whether it is an ex-voto or not. Perhaps when it comes to the mediating power of images, this distinction is not very important. The widely accepted Shi'i theological idea of martyrology and its promise of intercession and redemption motivate the presentation of supplications and invocations paired with thanksgivings. Both invocation gifts and ex-votos are believed to be invested with *barakat*. People may therefore approach a representation of a saint to honour him or her, express devotional sentiments and present their supplication or thanksgiving. To some people it is important to choose the representation of a saint with whom they have a particular relationship; to others, any image referring to members of the *ahl-e beyt* would do.

To summarise, the transactional relationship between the votary or beneficiary and the benefactor is sometimes expressed in iconography and captions within the image's frame, and sometimes in the careful positioning of separate images and ritual objects in relation to each other in ritual space, according to a transactional dramaturgy. The votary as a social actor is an important part of the transactional dramaturgy, as the votary relates to images and ritual objects, presenting supplications or thanksgivings. This also applies to the congregation, who, through ritual performance, may perform

personal supplications and thanksgivings, as well as contribute collectively to support the salvation of fellow human beings. *Hey'ats* and ritual locations may be included in the transactional process as recipients of images. In this structure, the votary, the beneficiary and the benefactor are independently represented, but nevertheless situated in reciprocity within the framework of a shared transactional dramaturgy. For example, the mother, as the votary, appeared in person carrying out religious work and devotional acts like pilgrimage; the boy, as the beneficiary, was symbolically represented by his single portrait; and Roqayyeh, as the benefactor, was symbolically represented by a replica of her shrine. These three constituted the core elements of the invocation process that took place, but the prayers, elegies and rites performed by the congregation served to enhance any request performed during the ritual performance, as did the abundant donation of votive gifts already offered to the saint.

The image as an adequate vehicle for invoking favour and giving thanks

In Iranian Shi'ism, images have become accepted as gifts presented for seeking help and as adequate thanksgivings. However, as Betteridge so accurately observes, Shi'i vow making is the gift-giving and gift-receiving process turned upside down.[14] The potential recipient of the gift, the saint, is not dependent upon the donor; instead, the relationship is reversed, and the person making the vow is dependent upon the saint's goodwill. Why should a gift, an image in particular, satisfy and persuade the mediating saint as an adequate donation for invoking favour and giving thanks?

One important function of votive gifts is their dissemination of *barakat*, grace.[15] Although the dissemination of votive gifts is believed to spread *barakat*, it is important to note that the power of votive gifts is not held to be in the gift itself. A votive gift is not initiated as a miracle-working act or object; rather, its power is generated by the intentions and commitments it symbolises. In general, people pointed to the importance of visualisation in that it may serve to focus the worshipper's attention on the person represented or referred to. This mental orientation is of a contemplative nature. Through the visual encounter, the mind is oriented toward recollecting the holy figure to whom one should express alliance, support and sympathy, and seek help from, as well as events from sacred history, which is what we may call the collective history of the religious community or the interpretive community. At the same time, it inspires the recollection of individual experiences, which often involves a personal 'encounter' with a saint, such as an intercession. Such experiences are important for the

votive practice, which is ultimately initiated by the faithful's conviction that the saint may intercede in his or her life. Visualisation may therefore help to focus people's concentration on spiritual matters and guide their attention to the saints. As such, an image would be an adequate vehicle for addressing a holy figure.

The votive image may be shared among people in a technical manner, in that the public presentation of votive images allows many people to share, or participate, in the looking at the images, a practice that can be performed over and over again. It is also shared in a conceptual manner, in that many believers agree upon the votive function of the images and relate to them accordingly. One way to stimulate a spiritual orientation of the mind is thus simply to look at images; another method is to touch them. Devotional practices, such as touching images and other items, are not regulated by orthodox ritual practice. Nevertheless, the practice of touching various objects while silently pronouncing a supplication (*do'a*) was rather common in the environment in which I conducted my field research. This practice is structured through popular sentiments. According to such attitudes, images were not believed to be miraculous, nor were they held to be agents that can provide help. Therefore, the votive image must be distinguished from the category of talisman. A talisman is typically used to counteract spells cast by the evil eye, and in the case of sudden sickness.[16] It is believed to be a blessed object and may be initiated. Votive images were not initiated – a fact that social actors were very specific about.

Images are displayed in public places and most of them are rather large, between 1 x 2 metres and 2 x 4 metres. They are visible to a large number of people and are, as the ex-votos, powerful testimonies (*shahadat*) and public announcements of divine intervention and merciful grace. They demonstrate that it is possible for humans to obtain personal, direct contact with God, and that God will answer the calling. They also express the votary's gratitude toward the saint, and eventually toward God. They are celebrations of the grace granted and function as honorary gifts intended to praise the benefactor. Moreover, the votive image is a memorial; it preserves the memory of mediators in the public space. An important condition for redemption and reward in Shi'ism is precisely to remember and mourn the sufferings of the mediating saints. In fact, many wall-hanging gifts also belong to the category of mourning images; they are employed to create a sad emotional space and recollect the tragic event at Karbala. As such, they also become useful votive gifts. The use of images in ritual space is thus an example of how Shi'i devotional practices engage the senses.

Images in the service of religion

The making and use of images in general, and the making of images of holy personages and use of images in religious contexts in particular, is a controversial issue in Islam. There are in particular two themes referred to in the Qur'an that make up the nucleus of Islamic iconoclasm: God is the creator of living things, and only God is worthy of worship.[17] As Grabar, however, has pointed out, the verses express opposition to the worship of physical idols but do not reject art or visual representations as such.[18] Accordingly, interviews with Shi'i religious scholars in Iran have revealed some reservations as to the use of figurative images in general, and toward the presence of images in ritual contexts in particular. Nevertheless, acknowledging that there is no explicit prohibition against images in the Qur'an, religious scholars say they cannot prohibit this; they can only warn people against the dangers of idolisation. As long as images are not the object of prayer, they may be put in the service of religion. This contemporary theological attitude about the use of images in Shi'ism is consistent with arguments that Paret has studied in Shi'i hadith, recorded between the eighth and the eleventh centuries.[19] According to Paret, there is no condemnation of making images in the hadith. Instead, Paret concludes, the discussion centred on the use of images; the believers were advised not to let images distract the prayer, and an image should not come between the devotee and the *qebleh*. Many contemporary religious scholars underline the representative character of images and their contemplative function. The image may also have didactical functions in teaching believers about religious dogmas and sacred history. Scholars have also acknowledged the power of visual representations when it comes to influencing people's emotions and expression of piety.[20] Accordingly, hosts and organisers of ritual assembly halls expressed great satisfaction about the images they received from votaries.

Concluding remarks

In Western research, the Islamic preference for aniconic art in mosque architecture has for a long time been understood to be paradigmatic for the decoration and creation of all kinds of ritual space. In his pioneering work *Painting in Islam*, Arnold argued, 'In no mosque nor in any other religious building are there to be found neither sculptures nor pictures.'[21] Not only did Arnold dismiss the admittance of figural imagery into buildings devoted to religious purposes, but he also rejected any application of iconography in contexts related to worship and suggested that such aniconic practice applied to any part of religious life of the Muslim world. By including Sufi

lodges, shrines, homes, coffee houses and public open spaces, such as streets and squares, more recent studies have revealed new dimensions of artistic expression and the application of figural arts in Muslim devotional life.[22] A fruitful approach has been to connect visual imagery to its context, be it architectural, ritual, devotional, social or otherwise.

The presentation of votive images is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary Iranian Shi'ism, although the phenomenon has not been systematically addressed in research until now. One explanation could be that the genre of votive images is difficult to identify. The challenge of defining exactly which image is a votive image offers, however, more of an academic challenge than a devotional obstacle to the faithful. Votaries seem perfectly comfortable with the ambiguity of the genre, and incorporate images into the dramaturgy of the votum process. The religious function of images in these communities is therefore unquestionable.

The present study has demonstrated that Iranian Shi'i votive images are sometimes supplied with the name of the donor, the year of donation and the receiver. The receiver can be a saint, a *hey'at* or a ritual assembly hall, testifying to the importance attached to these in the votum process. Votive images are related to each other in ritual space in a way that reflects the mechanism of *nazr kardan*; that is, vow, action and reciprocation. This process involves a votary who makes the vow, a mediator who intercedes and a gift. The image, being the gift, may be introduced to invoke favour or give thanks. The various elements in the transactional dramaturgy of the votive process are singled out and presented in individual images on display at various locations in the ritual space. The single portrait of the beneficiary is typically used as invocation. The single portrait of the saint, and crude visual narratives referring to the event in which the saint earned his or her power to act as mediator, are usually presented as ex-voto; these may become a vehicle for the presentation of new invocations. Invocational images are often hung on the wall, visible to visitors; the intention is to facilitate the recollection of the beneficiary in the minds of ritual performers requesting blessing. Otherwise, invocational images are placed in close proximity of thanksgivings, such as pseudo-portraits of saints, narratives and replicas of shrines. The purpose is also to call the saint's attention to the person represented, and the juxtaposition of the images is a symbolic representation of the commitment between the two.

An ex-voto is the culmination and proof of the transaction between a votary and the saint; it is a verification of God's mercy and the saint's compassion. A thanksgiving is held to be invested with *barakat*, grace and good fortune. The power is, however, not in the image itself. The image is

not miraculous; it is the person depicted who is venerated. Votive images are approached and made into the service of religion in two manners: by touching and by looking. The advantage of using an image as invocation and thanksgiving is its permanent nature; it can be revisited over and over again. The purpose of visualisation may be to focus the worshipper's attention on the holy figure, to whom one wishes to express alliance, support and sympathy, and seek help from. It is a contemplative device and serves to recollect God and the imams in the mind of the faithful. Visualisation is also a didactic tool to inform the believer of religious dogmas. The fact that votive images are gifts from different members of the community, and are not the result of the arrangement of an institution or one single host, shows the collective notion of the images' adequate function as a votive gift in the community.

NOTES

1. Haim 1984.
2. See, for example, Betteridge 1985; Kamalkhani 1998; Kalinock 2003; Torab 2005; Malekpour 2004.
3. The image as a votive gift is briefly discussed in Flaskerud 2005, pp. 65–91.
4. The study was conducted in Shiraz between 1999 and 2003 and was funded by the Norwegian Research Council.
5. In the Catholic tradition, common phrases identifying a votive image are 'Ex-voto', 'Ex V' and 'G.R.' (Per Grazia Ricevuta, meaning 'For Received Grace'). These phrases are, however, sometimes omitted.
6. The methodological and theoretical framework is inspired by the work of two art historians: van der Velden 2000; Belting 1994.
7. Whereas visitations to local *imamzadeh*, the tombs of men and women supposed to be the descendents of the Shi'i imams, might be frowned upon by those of a more orthodox predilection, elaborate rituals have been drawn up for the performance of the visitations to the shrines of Imam Ali, Imam Hoseyn, Abu al-Fazl Abbas and Imam Reza. Betteridge 1993, pp. 239–247.
8. Pelly 1970, vol. II, p. 35; Monchizadeh 1967, p. 116.
9. Malekpour 2004, p. 52.
10. Roqayyeh's shrine is in Damascus. The replica of her shrine I discuss here does not share any resemblance with the original; rather, its design was motivated by a dream experienced by the husband in the family owning the *hoseyniyeh*.
11. Similarly, Betteridge observed in Shiraz in the late 1970s that vowing to spread 'sofrehy-e Hezrat-e Roqayyeh' was believed to be especially efficacious when requesting cures of children's diseases. Betteridge 1985, p. 231.
12. Diba informs us that from the mid nineteenth century, memorial portraits in the tomb became widespread in Tehran and the provinces among the Qajar

nobility and the merchant class. Diba suggests that such practices may be partly explained by deep-seated beliefs that the images were invested with life. She refers to how a mid seventeenth-century Persian source records how a 'sorcerer' fashioned mutton grease into a figural effigy and utilised pins, candles and incantations to dispose of his enemy (Diba 1998, p. 43). It is possible that such belief continues to prevail in Iran in the twenty-first century, but in my experience many people would be inclined to call this idolatry.

13. Betteridge 1985, pp. 222–224.
14. Ibid., p. 216.
15. For a fulles discussion of Iranian Shia visual and material ritual culture, see Flaskerud 2010.
16. Kamalkhani 1998, p. 36.
17. The creative power of God is also underlined in sura 7:10, 59:24 and 64:2–3. The monotheistic doctrine in Islam underscores the unicity of God, *towhid*. Nothing should be associated with God, and sura 4:116 makes it clear that to associate anything with God is idolatry, *sherk*, and will not be tolerated. See also sura 6:74, 21:52, 26:70, 60:4 and 5:92.
18. Grabar 1987, p. 79.
19. Paret 1968, pp. 225–232.
20. A discussion of the fine line between the veneration and deification of ritual objects in ceremonial space among Shi'ias in India is offered by D'Souza 1998, pp. 76–79.
21. Arnold 1965, p. 4.
22. See, for example, Bravmann 1980 on Islam in Africa; Chelkowski 1986, pp. 209–226 on Shi'ism in Iran; D'Souza 1998, pp. 67–80 on Shi'ism in India; Frembgen 1998 and 2006 on Sufism in Pakistan; Lifchez 1992 on Sufism in Turkey; and Parker & Neal 1995 on Hajj paintings in Egypt.

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The Horse of Imam Hoseyn: Notes on the Iconography of Shi'i Devotional Posters from Pakistan and India

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen

Introduction

IN THE WORLD OF TWELVER SHI'ISM, the processional performances during the month of Moharram open a ritual space for a collective liminal experience. They are focused on the commemoration, recall and re-enactment of Shi'i *Heilsgeschichte* and spirituality, where material manifestations of religion play a key role in an intense communication with the divine, the processions on the ninth and tenth particularly bringing an encounter with such powerful symbols (*shabih*). One of them is Zoljanah (the 'winged one') – the white stallion the Prophet Mohammad's grandson rode during the battle of Karbala. As a witness to the heroic fight and to the martyrdom of Imam Hoseyn on Ashura, Zoljanah is the focus of popular piety and devotional religious practice. In this chapter, I examine how devotion to the white horse of the *seyyed ol-shohada* is reflected in modern twentieth- and twenty-first-century posters from Pakistan and India. Within popular Islamic poster art, the subject of Zoljanah comes under the category of Karbala images as well as holy mounts, such as Boraq and Duldul.[1]

It is stated that on the tenth of Moharram the four-year-old Sakineh held on to the legs of the horse to prevent her father, Hoseyn, from leaving for the battlefield. When the imam finally died, Zoljanah was riddled with wounds in the desert of Karbala and returned from the *maydan* without his rider. Within the popular Shi'i genre of *marsiyeh* literature, the Urdu poet Anis (1803–74), from Lucknow, composed the following verses mourning this event: 'The giant sank in the saddle without a sound; his mighty horse was pressed into the ground', and later, 'Hoseyn falls from his mount – calamity! His holy foot

falls from the horse's girth.'[2] Devotees narrate that the faithful Zoljanah started circumambulating the imam in order to protect him from the onslaughts of his enemies; he is even supposed to have trampled 40 enemy soldiers to death when they tried to come near the body of Hoseyn. According to one tradition, Zoljanah later killed himself after reaching the encampment of the imam's family; another account says that he jumped into the river Euphrates and never re-emerged.

In contemporary Moharram processions, Zoljanah is represented by a white horse that, in addition to being the most powerful symbol of the tragedy of Karbala, is also kept ready as a mount for the Twelfth Imam (who will appear before the Day of Judgement). In the cultures of Central, West and South Asia, the white horse traditionally appears as the mount best suited for a worldly and a spiritual ruler; thus, to mention only a few examples, depictions in the *Shahnameh* show Alexander the Great and Rostam riding one, and it is also the royal horse par excellence among Central Asian Turks and Arabs. In the Hindu tradition, a white horse is the mount for Vishnu in his last incarnation as the apocalyptic and messianic rider Kalkin – an idea probably borrowed from Islam. Likewise, in popular Sikh art, the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, is commonly depicted riding a white horse. Finally, within Shi'i visual arts, Ali is shown riding the white mule Duldul.

Abu al-Fazl Abbas, carrier of the banner of Karbala, is also usually depicted on a white horse. Since antiquity, in Iran a saddled horse without a rider was carried along as a mount for an invisible deity, as shown on Sogdian fresco paintings in Afrasiyab (seventh century). Generally speaking, in the cultures of the Middle East the riderless horse is a metaphor expressing the dimension of loss in a society and, at the same time, the hope for a saviour.

Zoljanah processions

The following description and analysis of the role of Zoljanah in Moharram processions is based on my own observations in different regions of Pakistan (particularly in Lahore, but also in Karachi and in Nager and Hunza in the Karakoram) since 1989.[3]

In advance, it should be emphasised that the aura of holiness surrounding the white stallion is heightened by the fact that the horse should never be used by anybody for riding.[4] This ideal is put into practice especially by the Shi'i community of Lahore and Multan. To my knowledge, in rural areas and smaller towns the riderless horse appears only during the period of Moharram and is otherwise used for riding.

In the Walled City of Lahore – the focal point of the metropolis' Shi'i culture and population – the Zoljanah tradition is especially connected to the immigrant group of the Qizilbash, who originally came from Baku in Azerbaijan. In other places, rituals are predominantly organised and promoted by the Seyyeds. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Qizilbash are said to have moved to the area that is now Pakistan. One of their early settlers was Nawab Fateh Ali Khan Qizilbash, who is credited with promoting the breeding of fine horses (especially as embodiments of Zoljanah) and the religious customs of Moharram in general. This tradition has been continued until now under the Qizilbash Trust of Lahore. The horses mostly come from Sargodha and Sahiwal, the main centres of horse breeding in the Punjab. After their birth, foals are demarcated as Zoljanahs by calling the *azan* into their right ear. They are then kept on special meadows separate from the other horses and are given special fodder. They are taken by a special groom (*sais*) on a 12-kilometre walk for exercise daily. My source, Abbas Raza Qizilbash from Lahore, mentions that the average age of a horse is 17–18 years, even though a horse is at its peak between 5 and 10 years. The animal is especially trained to face problems of fatigue during processions and not to get irritated by the mourners.

On the ninth and tenth of Moharram, Zoljanah is ceremonially paraded through cities, towns and villages. Out of devotion for the 'prince of the martyrs' his horse is richly adorned: the saddlecloth is jewelled, the reins are silver-plated and a copy of the Qur'an is placed on the saddle in place of the Third Imam. On the croup of the horse, the saddlecloth is decorated with a double row of 14 small silver cupolas symbolising the mausolea of the 14 *ma'sum*, that is, Mohammad, Fatemeh and the Twelve Imams (poster no. 22). To indicate the battle wounds of Karbala, the animal is made up as if pierced with arrows and also is smeared with blood. During the *julus* (procession), believers touch Zoljanah and kiss his flanks in deep devotion, uttering invocations and individual vows (*mannat*). They also kiss the flowers hanging over his head and consecrate black- and red-coloured threads through touching the horse, which thereby acquire amuletic significance. The *chadar* (cloth) put on the horse is torn into little strips and distributed to the women as *tabarrok*. Because of *mannat*, children and sometimes also adult men slip under the belly of the horse. For the same reason, the pious donate gold and silver jewellery, as well as money, which is put into bags hanging from the flanks of the horse. Later, the Qizilbash administer these donations following a special system whereby jewellery

goes into their trust to support the poor and money is distributed among their own lineages (*got*).

In Lahore, for instance, during the well-known ritual performances in Krishannagar on the ninth, the main procession carrying shrine replicas, *alam*s and banners moves through the main roads, whereas the *shabih-ye Zoljanah* is led through the narrow residential lanes. As the latter group proceeds, the animal is auspiciously led into *imambargah*s (Shi'i assembly halls) and mosques as well as private spaces (courtyards and garages as well as temporary roadside spaces separated by *shamiana*s) of noble, high-status Shi'as. However, Lahore's main procession is the *markazi julus* in the Walled City, whose parade route starts from Nisar Haveli and Mubarak Haveli (inside Mochi Darwaza), leads through different Shi'i neighbourhoods and finally leaves the old city through Bhatti Darwaza to reach Karbala Gamey Shah. *Ashura* begins with an evening *majlis* in the courtyard of Nisar Haveli, while Zoljanah is elaborately decorated for hours within an adjacent enclosure. The *julus* then slowly starts moving at around midnight, and in the morning, the first horse is replaced by another one, because it would be impossible to parade an exhausted animal nonstop for almost 20 hours around the city, visiting more than 120 *imambargah*s.

The iconography of Zoljanah on Shi'i posters from Pakistan and India

Depictions of Zoljanah can be found in different genres of Shi'i religious art from Iran representing antecedents of later popular poster prints.[5] He appears, for instance, in lithographic illustrations of religious literature in the Qajar period;[6] on the painted tiles of Shi'i places of assembly and theatres, such as the remarkable *tekiyyeh* Mo'aven al-Molk in Kermanshah (*c.* 1917); in mural paintings of the nineteenth century in shrines, such as the Imamzadeh Shah Zaid in Isfahan; as well as in reverse-glass paintings, in wall hangings (*parcham*) and in painted scrolls used by itinerant Karbala storytellers.[7] In early twentieth-century India, the technical innovation of printing gave rise to the emergence of modern Hindu, Sikh and Islamic poster art, based upon earlier pictorial sources. Posters with Shi'i subjects, of course, represent only a subcategory of Islamic bazaar prints. Within our collection at the Munich State Museum of Ethnology, we have 65 posters from Pakistan and India related to the world of the Twelver Shi'ism (acquired by myself between 1988 and 2009). Of these, 20 images depict Zoljanah. With the exception of two, they all belong to the latest phase, from the 1960s until the present. In addition, I have documented three depictions of the horse on posters pasted on walls in public spaces announcing *majlis*.

The posters showing Zoljanah – with the exception of a print from Iran, completely in profile – can be divided into three groups:

1. painted depictions of the white horse within the scenery of Karbala;
2. juxtaposed depictions of Zoljanah and Boraq;
3. unusual photographic depictions of Zoljanah.

Each of these groups is discussed next.

Painted depictions of the white horse within the scenery of Karbala

The two oldest posters in our collection are partly torn chromolithographs dating from the 1940s or 1950s.[8] The first one (no. 1 of the list included at the end of this chapter) is badly damaged and was purchased from a footpath vendor in front of a mosque in Saddar, Karachi. Pierre and Micheline Centlivres have published a well-preserved copy of the same print, with only slight differences in colour.[9] The picture is entitled *shabih-ye Zoljanah Hazrat Imam Hoseyn* '*alayha al-salam*. It shows the lavishly decorated white stallion in the centre, his head crowned with a plume and a golden ornament with a star and crescent, the imam's turban adorned by an aigrette placed on the saddle with a shield and sword hanging below it. Zoljanah is showered with arrows and returns in pace to the five tents (identified by a cartouche with the inscription 'tents of the *ahl-e beyt*') depicted in the lower right corner of the picture. The camp of the Prophet's family is further marked by the green-flagged standard of Abbas, to which his water bag, perforated by arrows, is fixed. In this type of composition, characteristic of other Zoljanah posters as well, the foreground is separated from the background (showing the innumerable tents of the 'army of Yazid') by the horizontal line of the Euphrates.

The second print, the only one of this group in vertical format, was collected from a poor Shi'i family from Lucknow (Figure 74), but I also saw the same poster displayed in the Dargah Hazrat-e Abbas in Lucknow. It is entitled 'Holy Horse (Muslim)' and is no. 84 of the series published by Sree Lakshmi Agencies in Sivakasi (a small town in South India). Unlike the other Indo-Pakistani prints of the first group, Zoljanah is depicted standing with his head turned to the left. Does that indicate that it was not only published by a Hindu company, but also painted by a non-Muslim? Be that as it may, almost all the contemporary machine-embroidered wall hangings from Iran depicting Zoljaneh, as well as examples from Pakistan, show the horse with its head turned to the left. In any case the composition of our poster has to be 'read' from left to right: starting with the horse's head

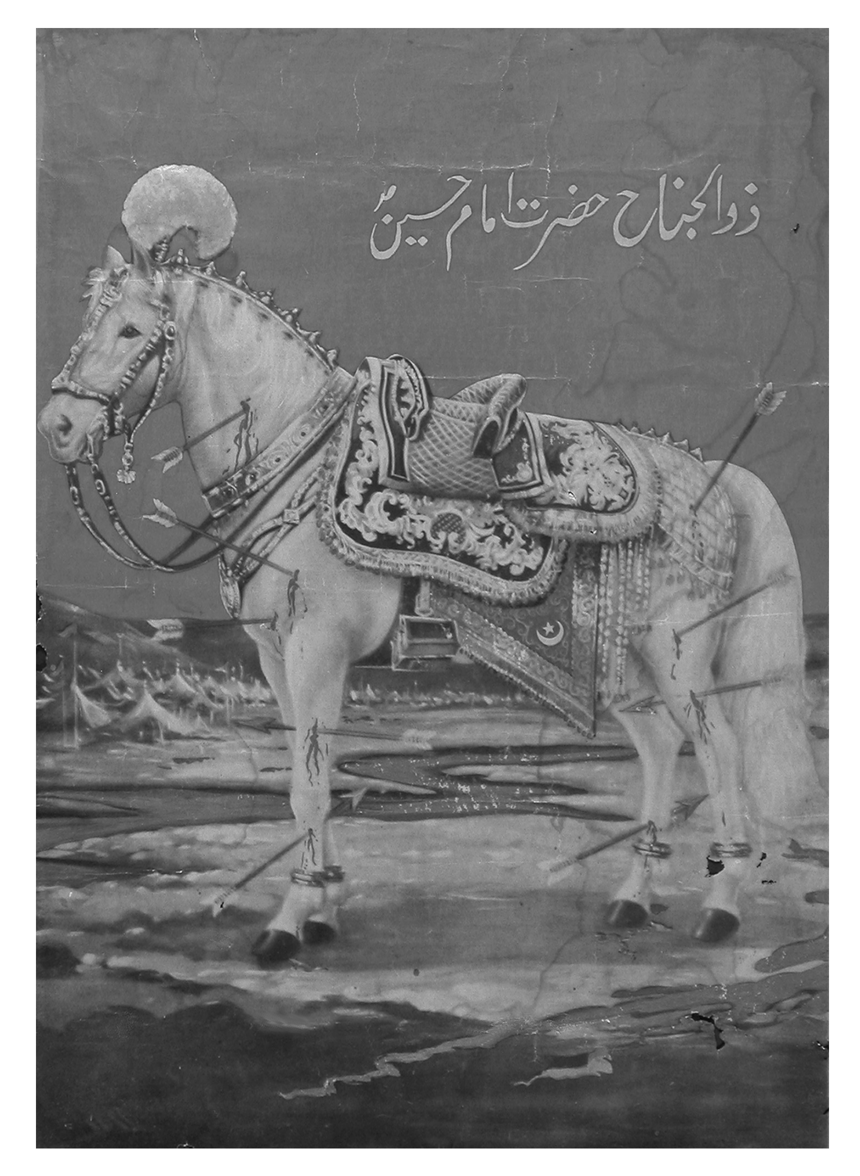


Figure 74 Image of Zoljanah printed in Sivakasi.
Courtesy of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology.

(adorned by a round shape unfamiliar nowadays and probably made of wool), and his arrow-pierced chest and left foreleg, set against the background of the enemies' encampment, the view is then focused on the empty saddle with richly embellished saddlecloths underneath. Right above, there is the inscription *Zoljanah Hazrat-e Imam Hoseyn*. The message of the death of the beloved imam is emphasised by the Euphrates in the centre filled with

the blood of the martyrs. More streams of blood can be seen in the lower right corner.

The composition of the third Zoljanah poster, painted by H. R. Raja and collected in Lucknow, builds upon the earlier models but is, by and large, more schematic and static: the figure of the horse appears to be frozen like a statue and the splendid decoration with the empty saddle is ornate but less vivid than that of its forerunners.[10] Details such as the plume and star and crescent (no. 1), empty saddle (no. 2), and shape of the enemies' tents (no. 2) were borrowed and modified. The form of the stirrup appears fancy and bears no resemblance to original pieces. Emphasis is placed on epigraphy: in the upper right corner, there is the hadith 'Hoseyn is from me and I am from Hoseyn' in Arabic as well as in Urdu, followed by a calligraphic *ya Hoseyn* set right above Zoljanah's saddle, and the additional *shahid-e Karbala* against the background of dripping blood.

In poster no. 4, printed by Brijbasi in Bombay, the Arabian desert, so typically mirroring the tragic events of Karbala in many images, has been replaced by a lush green Indian landscape with flowers, gable-roofed cottages (substituting for Yazid's tents) and Mughal-style domed mausolea in the background (Figure 75).[11] The depiction of Zoljanah in the centre closely resembles that in the previously mentioned poster but is here



Figure 75 Image of Zoljanah printed in Bombay.
Courtesy of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology.

equipped with golden stirrups. The idyllic and peaceful setting is disturbed only by the arrows piercing the animal's body.

A new element appears in the lower right corner of poster no. 5, printed by M. Siddiq in Lahore: the depiction of Imam Hoseyn's mausoleum in Karbala. Zoljanah is therefore placed more to the left of the centre, his head reverently bowed before the saint's tomb. Instead of a saddle, there is an embellished saddlecloth with the inscribed names of the *panjtan pak* (*ahl-e beyt*). Right above, instead of the rider, the illustrator depicts a hand shaded by an umbrella. The hand obviously symbolises the *panjtan pak* and the umbrella divine protection, although it is also a sign of royalty. The double-row Urdu inscription reads: *na Hoseyn ghore pe tham-sake keh sada azan ki boland thi – woh namaz-e asr ka waqt tha jo zamin pe khud ko gira-diya*, meaning 'Hoseyn could not remain seated on the horse when he heard the call for prayer – it was the time of *asr* prayer when he let himself fall on the ground'.

The smaller poster no. 6 was collaged by the well-known illustrator and poster artist Sarwar Khan from Lahore, who used the previous Zoljanah depiction but added a turban (see no. 1), a shield and a sword, as well as a tassel, and set it against a black background, together with a few more symbolic references to Karbala cut out from other posters.[12] A variation of this depiction has also been used in a much more simplified way for a *majlis* poster (no. 7).

As far as posters Nos. 5–7 are concerned, a comparative look at poster no. 8 (printed by Brijbasi in Bombay),[13] shows that, in fact, Ali's mount Duldul had been borrowed by the collage artist from a lavish Indian landscape (surprisingly decorated with Egyptian pyramids) and transposed to a Karbala setting, while transforming Duldul into Zoljanah by piercing it with arrows and removing the name *Allah* written above the names of the *panjtan pak*.[14] Moreover, the sunrays on the upper left corner of poster no. 8 have been converted into a hail of arrows on poster no. 5. On the other side of the Euphrates there are two encampments of the army of Yazid. Apparently, the illustrator was inspired by the original multicoloured segmented tents of Imam Hoseyn's encampment (depicted in poster no. 1)[15] but somewhat thoughtlessly placed them on the upper left corner, converting them into an encampment of the enemy.

Posters nos. 9 and 10, acquired in Lahore in 2006, show Zoljanah carrying a prominent saddle with a high back (resembling a frame saddle) as well as iron stirrups. He is standing on blood-drenched ground, indicating the battlefield of Karbala, set against a blood-red sky at sunset. This depiction is accompanied by calligraphic references to Ali (no. 9) and pictorial ones

to Hoseyn riding the horse and holding Ali Asqar in his arm (no. 10). The latter, a well-known composition, is taken from Iranian devotional paintings and is the only one where Zoljanah is depicted unwounded. In *majlis* poster no. 11, the illustrator clearly borrowed the Zoljanah depiction from the previously discussed images.

Unlike the prints nos. 1–11, which are partly based on Indian models, poster no. 12, printed by Malik Shafiq Art Publishers in Lahore, shows Zoljanah galloping in the desert of Karbala, the reins hanging loose, fleeing a hail of arrows coming from the left side (Plate 9). Following the model of poster no. 1, a turban with an aigrette is placed on the saddle and a shield and sword are hanging below. The turban is a general symbol for honour and authority in the Muslim world. The enemies' tents (*khaima asaqia*), on the other side of the Euphrates, have the same schematic shape as in no. 5. Illustrators copied this Zoljanah depiction and also placed it on *majlis* posters (no. 13).

Poster no. 14 is a very dense composition in vertical format, collaged by Sarwar Khan from Lahore. It shows Zoljanah in the lower left corner returning at a gallop from the battlefield of Karbala, whose tragic events are depicted in much detail. The image of the horse has been borrowed from the previously discussed print with only slight decorative additions (cupolas on the croup and ornaments on the shield, as well as additional tassels and accoutrements of the embroidery).

In image no. 15 (printed by Malik Shafiq Art Publishers in Lahore), the galloping wounded Zoljanah, further elevated by the symbols of the hand (identified as *dast-e mobarak-e Imam Hoseyn*) and the royal umbrella, is depicted on the left side, whereas the huge shrine of Imam Hoseyn dominates the right side. Additional symbolic references on the upper part of the poster show the Prophet's mosque in Medina, a round shape containing the names of *Allah* and the *ahl-e-beyt*, a white dove carrying a letter, and a blood-dripping rose on a pole. In Islamic imagery the rose generally appears as a symbol of the presence of God and of the Prophet, and in the Shi'i context as a reference to the suffering of the Twelve Imams (nos. 9 and 14–24). The round tents depicted in the foreground of our poster and dotting the riverside are diminutive and appear toylike. The Urdu inscription in the centre says, 'neither in the mosque,[16] nor in the shade of the walls of the House of God – the prayer of devotion is offered in the shade of the swords.'

The last two posters of this group showing prominent depictions of Zoljanah need to be mentioned only briefly because they are recently imported works copied from contemporary Iranian paintings (nos. 16

and 17). Both paintings are more related to European-influenced Iranian art than to South Asian calendar art, with its contemporary collage style. Their subject is the return of the wounded horse to Hoseyn's camp and the mourning of the women. Poster no. 16 is based on a poster printed in Tehran and painted by Mohammad Tajvidi.[17] In no. 17, made by the famous Iranian artist Mahmoud Farshchian[18] (born in 1930 in Isfahan), even the doves – birds of peace – are depicted bleeding and about to die. It is instructive to note that the artists used predominantly green, white and red – the colours of the Iranian flag. The pictures were adapted to the Shi'i culture of Pakistan by collaging them with additional symbols such as the hand, rose and umbrella, as well as with inscriptions. Thus, they contain the Urdu saying: *qatl-e Hoseyn asl men marg-e Yazid hai – Islam zindah hota hai har Karbala ke ba'd* (In reality, the killing of Hoseyn is the death of Yazid – Islam comes alive after every Karbala). During the first ten days of Moharram, devotees in Lahore particularly like to display such posters made by Iranian artists, of a large size and framed, in public spaces on *imambargah* stages used for ritual performances.

Juxtaposed depictions of Zoljanah and Boraq

Collages with juxtaposed depictions of Zoljanah and Boraq, the most important holy mounts in Muslim folklore, constitute a popular theme in Shi'i posters printed in Lahore.

Poster no. 18, in horizontal format, shows the fabulous angelic Boraq, with wings and rich jewellery typical of late Indian and Persian images, occupying the hierarchical right side in juxtaposition with Zoljanah on the left.[19] The latter is depicted comparatively smaller and placed closer to the picture's margin in order to emphasise the outstanding significance of the Prophet's mount. This depiction of Zoljanah is a variation of the one shown in posters nos. 5 and 8. The image is completed by the central icon of the Ka'beh and the Prophet's mosque in Medina, framed by a silver crescent. The intention to represent the Karbala paradigm as an integral part of orthodox scriptural Islam is further clarified by three roses, symbols of purity, depicted high up in the air and inscribed with the invocations *ya Allah* (right corner), *ya Mohammad* (centre) and the name *Imam Hoseyn* (left corner).

Print no. 19 was acquired in 2006 and shows the same composition as no. 18 but reveals the modern trend of incorporating photographs; in this case, of views of sacred architecture and the sea (Plate 10). The depiction of Zoljanah has been borrowed from no. 9.

In the next two posters, hierarchy is not expressed through right-left orientation, but along the vertical axis. Thus, poster no. 20, designed by Sarwar Khan, shows the winged Boraq flying toward the sky, leaving the

Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem below, whereas Zoljanah is depicted in the foreground at a gallop in the desert of Karbala.[20] The depiction of Zoljanah is copied from poster no. 12, with minor changes and additions. The turban has been replaced by the rose bearing the inscription *Imam Hoseyn Seyed ol-shohada*, the shield has buckles and the horse is wearing anklets. The Shi'i context is further emphasised by depictions of the shrine of Imam Hoseyn (juxtaposed with the Dome of the Rock) and of tents and standards. The Punjabi inscription above Boraq says, *'arsh-e barin te zara mere Mohammad pyariya* (My beloved Mohammad is in the uppermost heaven), and below is the same Urdu verse (although incomplete) as in no. 15.

Poster no. 21 (Figure 76) has a similar vertical composition, showing the winged Boraq with elongated trunk right beneath the *rozey-e Hazrat-e Imam Hoseyn* and red, pink and orange roses, one inscribed with the name Hoseyn and the other 14 with those of martyrs of Karbala (*chaudah masumin*). In the lower right corner, Zoljanah is depicted with his head bowed down in sorrow (such as in one of the Iranian pictures) and with the symbol of the hand in the place of the rider. Inscriptions identify the hand, which is haloed by the sun, as symbolising the *panjtan pak*; in the rays is written *Islam zindah hota hai – har Karbala ke ba'd* (Islam comes alive after every Karbala). Next to the horse there is the Punjabi text: *aya hu aya – ghora Hoseyn ka*[21] *– wal khaime de khali – ghore diyan wangan pharke kitthe chhad aya aye ummat da wali – lutya-giya Hoseyn ghora rah-giya khali* (O, my God! – The horse of Hoseyn – toward the tents without a rider – somebody holding the bridle asked, 'Where did you leave "the saviour of the people" '? – Having left Hoseyn, the horse returned without a rider).

Unusual photographic depictions of Zoljanah

Two posters of our series stand out because of their use of photographs of horses. In the centre of the small print no. 22, the illustrator placed a Zoljanah in full ceremonial attire as it can be seen nowadays in processions (Figure 77). In addition to this photograph, the collage shows pictorial symbols referring to Ali and Ghazi Abbas, a view of the mausoleum of Imam Hoseyn and the names of the *panjtan pak*. Interestingly, a photograph of the famous *Ustad ka tazia* is placed in the lower right corner. This splendid shrine model used in Moharram rituals in Multan was made after 1943 by Ustad Ilahi Bakhsh from Chiniot.

Poster no. 23 gives a religious-hippological view of five elaborately adorned horses carrying 'rose-saddles' with the mausolea of the *panjtan pak* (Figure 78). With the exception of the Prophet's tomb in Medina, depicted in the middle of the upper row flanked by those of Ali and Fatemeh, the pictorial views of the mausolea are partly framed by pearls and the names

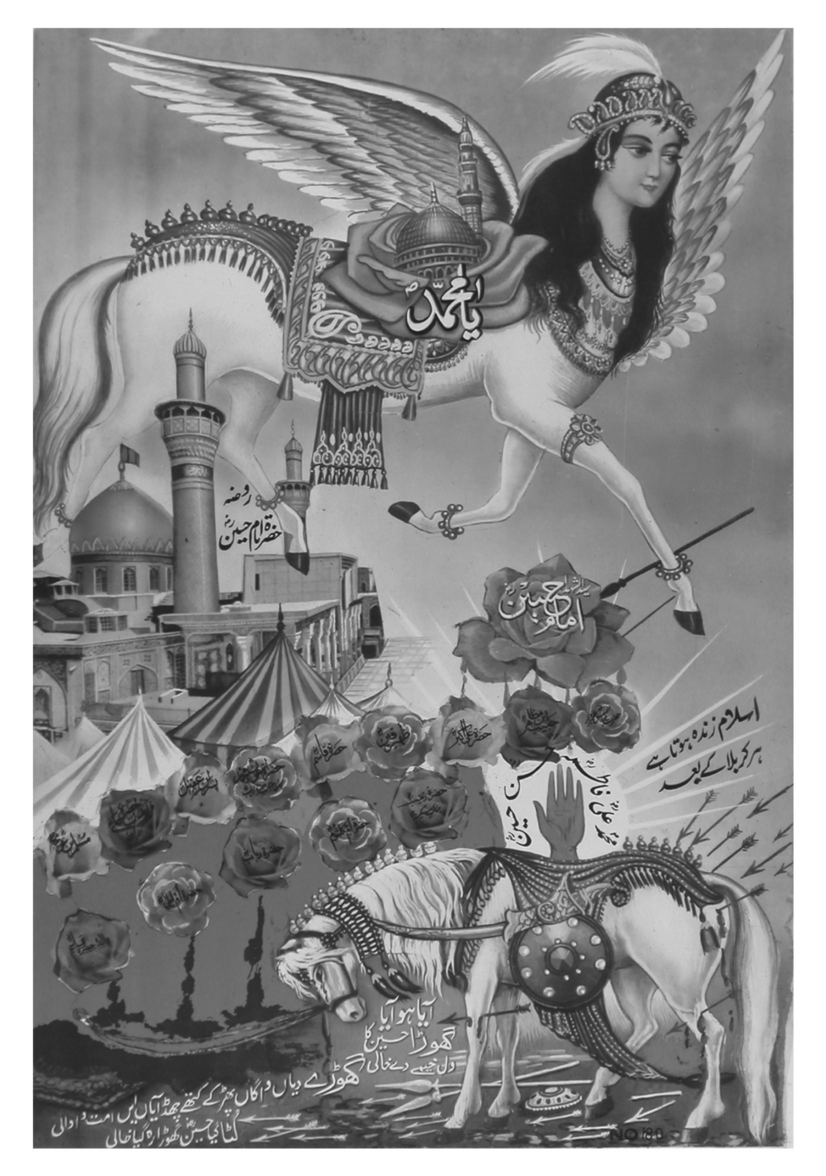


Figure 76 Boraq and Zoljanah depicted on a poster with inscriptions in Urdu and Punjabi. Courtesy of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology.

calligraphed with roses. The photographs of the mounts, all depicted with their heads to the left, show white (Mohammad and Hasan), greyish (Fatemeh and Hoseyn) and black (Ali) horses. Set against a fiery red sky, the space between the horses is filled by a hand inscribed with the *kalima* (palm), the *basmala* (thumb) and the *nad-e Ali* protective verse (index finger to little finger). Below, there is the calligraphic invocation *ya Hoseyn*,



Figure 77 Collage with a photograph of Zoljanah during procession. Courtesy of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology.

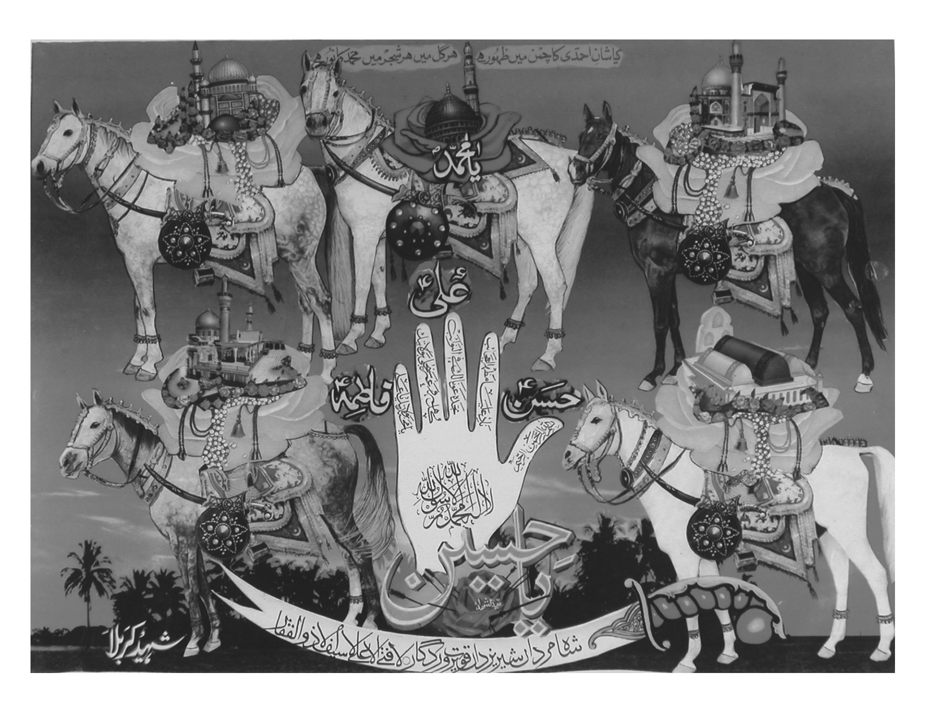


Figure 78 Poster showing five horses carrying ‘rose-saddles’. Courtesy of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology.

as well as Ali's famous Zolfaqar. Finally, above Mohammad's mount, we read the Prophet's praise in Urdu: *kya shan-e Ahmadi ka chaman men zahur hai – har gul men har shajar men Mohammad ka nur hai* (What a glory appears in the garden of Ahmad – in every flower and on every tree there is the light of Mohammad).

Concluding remarks

The horse of Imam Hoseyn is an essential part of the Shi'i symbolic language. Referring to the martyrdom of the beloved Third Imam, it plays a central role in the ritual processions of Moharram. Within the genre of popular, mass-produced poster-prints immersed in Shi'i devotionalism, its depiction, therefore, has powerful iconic significance. In the narrative compositions illustrating the tragedy of Karbala, the representation of Zoljanah either is monumental, acquiring a static quality, or appears in movement at a gallop. In any case, Hoseyn's horse becomes the centre of these Karbala images mediating essential concepts of the Shi'i tradition. In collages Zoljanah is sometimes juxtaposed with the Prophet's holy mount, thereby not only emphasising Hoseyn's descent from the founder of Islam, but also evoking the idea of martyrdom as a path to heaven.

Notes

This article is dedicated to my dear friend Sayyid Asif Ali Zaidi from Lahore.

1. Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997, pp. 43–47; Centlivres-Demont 2003, pp. 109, 111.
2. Matthews 1994, pp. 81, 83.
3. Pinault has described and analysed the Zoljanah processions in Leh, the district capital of Ladakh (Pinault 2001, pp. 121–156).
4. In Iranian Shi'i performances there is the exception that an actor impersonating Imam Hoseyn rides Zoljanah within the ritual drama known as *ta'ziyeh*.
5. More schematic and simplified depictions of the horse of Imam Hoseyn are also found on embroidered pieces of cloth, called *parcham*, which are brought from the pilgrimage to Iranian Shi'i shrines and hung up on the walls of *imambargah*s. In addition, it should be mentioned that there are occasionally also sculptures depicting Zoljanah, such as figures carved out of wood, which are placed on a wheeled cart (as seen at an *imambargah* in Karachi), as well as small modern devotional figures set into glass cases and offered for sale at shrines.
6. Marzolph 2001, fig. 90.2.
7. Peterson 1988, fig. 14.
8. Of course, there were additional depictions of the horse in this early period of poster art (see Puin 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 456–457, Vol. 3, p. 858), but, unlike those discussed here, they apparently did not serve as models for later compositions. In a shrine in Nurpur (near Islamabad), I found a poster depicting Zoljanah

also moving in pace to the right side, but lifting its left foreleg, having all four of its knees bandaged and with the symbolic hand protruding from the saddle. It was printed by Hafiz Qamar al-Din and Sons (Mochi Gate, Tirgaran Street, Lahore), as no. 56 of a series. In a figural calligraphy composition reverse painted with wax on glass, which I would tentatively date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I saw the horse depicted in the same posture, but with a turban on the saddle shaded by an umbrella. This devotional object belongs to the Bara Imambarga in Lucknow.

9. Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997, p. 47, no. 37.
10. See Saeed 2007, p. 87 (fig. 12).
11. See Centlivres-Demont 2003, pp. 112, 117, fig. III.7; Harrison and Kumar 2003, p. 57 top. The trappings shown here very much resemble the ones depicted on a recently acquired poster with an additional 'rose-saddle' (no. 24; cf no. 23).
12. See Centlivres-Demont 2003, pp. 110–111.
13. See variation published by Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997, p. 47, no. 38.
14. In the upper right corner there is the famous Urdu saying, *ya Ali mushkil kusha mushkil-kushai kijie – hun asir ranj-o-gham mujhko rihai dijie* (Oh Ali, problem-solver, please solve the problems! – I am captured in sadness and sorrow, set me free!).
15. See Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997, p. 45, no. 34.
16. The letter *mim* for *masjid* has been omitted (see the incomplete verse on poster no. 15).
17. Centlivres-Demont 2003, p. 116, fig. III.5.
18. This is the common spelling of his name on the Internet; otherwise, it is also given as 'Mahmud Farshjiyan' (Centlivres-Demont 2003, p. 106). For the same image of Zoljanah, but without the symbols added by the Pakistani collagist, see Puin 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 458–460, Vol. 3, p. 860.
19. See Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997, p. 46, no. 35. The collage character of the poster, printed by Malik Shafiq Art Publishers in Lahore, also becomes apparent from the fact that it is signed by both Malik Khurshid and Sarwar Khan.
20. The same poster is discussed and shown in Puin 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 546–548, Vol. 3, p. 913.
21. Using here the Urdu genitive (!).

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List of Posters with Inventory Numbers of the Munich State Museum of Ethnology

No. 1: Inv.-No. 04–326 236
No. 2: Inv.-No. 93–317 248
No. 3: Inv.-No. 93–317 249
No. 4: Inv.-No. 93–317 252
No. 5: Inv.-No. 92–316 590
No. 6: Inv.-No. 06–327 943
No. 7: photograph taken *in situ* in Multan
No. 8: Inv.-No. 93–317 253
No. 9: Inv.-No. 06–327 942
No. 10: Inv.-No. 06–327 941
No. 11: photograph taken *in situ* in Lahore
No. 12: Inv.-No. 88–310 848
No. 13: photograph taken *in situ* in Lahore
No. 14: Inv.-No. 06–327 939
No. 15: Inv.-No. 88–310 852
No. 16: Inv.-No. 02–324 099
No. 17: Inv.-No. 04–325 490
No. 18: Inv.-No. 88–310 845
No. 19: Inv.-No. 06–327 940
No. 20: Inv.-No. 88–310 850
No. 21: Inv.-No. 88–310 843
No. 22: Inv.-No. 06–327 944
No. 23: Inv.-No. 88–310 840
No. 24: Inv.-No. 09–329 728

Lions' Representation in Bakhtiari Oral Tradition and Funerary Material Culture[1]

Pedram Khosronejad

> All the lions seek moonlight.
> I am a lion and the friend of moonlight.
>
> – Rumi, *Diwan* 919/9674[2]

Introduction

IN THE LAST 70 YEARS, IRANIAN society has changed a great deal and, consequently, Iranian nomadic societies, like any other small-scale societies of Iran, have also changed. This trend of transformation is mainly the result of policies introduced by the Iranian central government with regard to the nomadic way of life. In addition, the general modernisation of Iran over the course of the last century can be considered the other important factor in accelerating this process. Any research aiming to investigate and preserve the history of nomadic societies in Iran therefore has great significance today.

Death and funerary rituals have a special significance in Bakhtiari culture. The death of a tribe or family member is not merely a biological event mourned by the bereaved relatives; rather, that death evokes moral and social obligations that are expressed through culturally-determined funeral practices.

In Bakhtiari society, the number as well as the scale of the funerary ceremonies and material culture varies according to the sex, age and sociopolitical status of the deceased. How deep the shock, and how dramatic the subsequent events, depend on the age and identity of the departed and the circumstances of the death.

In this regard, the chapter illustrates the religious significance and social functions of the lion as a symbol amongst the Bakhtiari nomads.

Bakhtiari Nomads

The word 'Bakhtiari' denotes, nowadays, the people who constitute the majority of the pastoral nomads of the mountains of Iran as well as the regions that they occupy. The Bakhtiari represent one of the four groups of the *lor* tribes, who are a partly nomadic people living in the south-west of the Zagros Mountains. They migrate twice a year between their winter and summer pastures, leaving in spring and returning in autumn, and they are Muslims of the Imamate (Twelver) branch of Shi'ism. They are one of the important nomadic tribal groups in Iran who have had a long connection with, and influence on, the political life of Iran during the last two centuries.[3]

The population of the territory of the Bakhtiari is split down into pastoral nomads; villagers and sedentary people make up, according to the census of 1986, 1.627 million inhabitants (nomadic population: 235,000; rural population: 794,000; urban population: 598,000).

The lion in Bakhtiari oral beliefs and traditions

The lion (*shir*) is often presented in Bakhtiari oral and folklore legends as a real and wild animal, but it is often considered a sacred animal representing virility.[4] The Iranian lion (Panthera Leo Persica) was the size of the Iranian panther. It weighed from 300 to 500 kilograms and measured three feet. Its colour was a yellow that veered toward brown. Its coat was thicker than that of the African lion. This breed of lion has, alas, disappeared from Iran. We know, however, that this lion lived in regions such as the Arjan plain (located 57 kilometres to the west of Shiraz), in the mountains of the Zagros and in the region of Khuzestan.[5]

It was believed that the last Iranian lion was killed in 1919 by Zell al-soltan, the son of the sovereign Qajar Naser al-Din Shah. However, in 1942, an American engineer who was working on the Iranian railways reported seeing in the vicinity of Dezful the carcass of an Iranian lion;[6] this is the last reliable report of the sighting of such a lion.

With regard to the lion as a wild animal for the Bakhtiari, Layard says:

> Lions abound in the district of Ram Hormuz and on the banks of the Karun. They also frequently ascend, in search of prey, to the higher valleys at the foot of the great chain of the Lur Mountains. During my residence here (i.e. Kala Tul) several have been seen in the neighbourhood and a large lioness was killed a short time ago by a matchlock-man in the 'teng' (i.e. defile) of Halaugon. She measured 10 ½ feet in length. Lions in this country are sometimes very bold and fierce and are consequently much dreaded by the Iliyât.[7]

He continues:

> The lion has not, I believe, been known to traverse the high chain of the Lurestan Mountains into the valleys on the Persian side. In the plains of Khuzistan its usual places of concealment are the brushwood and jungle on the banks of rivers and streams and in the rice-grounds. The Bakhtiyari mountains contain leopards of great size and fierceness. They rarely, however, attack men, but frequently carry off cattle and sheep.[8]

Based on these accounts, we can be sure that in the Bakhtiari regions the animal called the lion existed. The travellers also tell us about the power of the lions in the Bakhtiari regions and the way in which the presence of this animal perturbed the daily life of the nomads:

> The Susianian lion is, nevertheless a formidable animal, and stories of encounters with it, and of travellers who have been attacked and devoured form part of the staple of the evening's talk in a Lur tent. As to its strength, the Bakhtiyari allege that it can carry off a full-sized buffalo or an ox, but not a sheep for they say when it bears away a buffalo it invokes the aid of Ali, but when a sheep it relies upon its own strength. Shefi'a Khan, however, attempted to explain his alleged fact to me by suggesting that whilst the lion could throw a large animal like a cow or buffalo over its back, it was obliged to trail a sheep on the ground and to abandon it when pursued.[9]

The existence of the lion in the Bakhtiari regions and the threat that it represented in the people's daily life have created popular legends and beliefs among these tribes that have nowadays completely disappeared and are forgotten. Layard writes:

> During my residence in the Bakhtiyari mountains the story of a great chief's valour and prowess, and how he had addressed the lion, formed a constant theme of conversation in the tents, and I have no doubt has remained a tradition amongst the tribes.[10]

One of the very popular subjects regarding these legends was the hunting of the lion by brave men and Bakhtiari heroes accompanied by the story of body-to-body combat with the lion. In these stories, the lions occasionally attack the nomads: women, children and other beings with no means of defence over whom the valiant men, who in order to defend their tribe kill

the lions, kept watch. Occasionally men also go and hunt this animal to show their bravery and their valour.

> To kill a lion, especially in single combat, was considered a great feat. Mehemet Taki Khan was renowned for his skill and cool courage in these encounters, and other chiefs were celebrated for victories they have achieved over this ferocious and wily beast. Whilst I was living with the Bakhtiyari I was present at more than one lion hunt.[11]

Layard continues:

> Mehemet Ali Beg related to me how on one occasion as he was striking his tents to move up to the '*sardsirs*' or summer pastures in the mountains, a lion suddenly dashed into the midst of the women who were on horseback, others on foot. The greatest confusion and alarm prevailed. Several of the women were knocked down, but were not injured by the animal, which Mehemet Ali Beg's wife was riding.[12]

The interesting point is that before attacking or killing the lion, the man who wanted to fight it always spoke to it:

> He flew to her rescue, and addressing the savage beast, according to the custom of the Lurs, is some such words as: 'O lion! What hast thou to do with women? Dost thou fear to face a man like me?' despatched it with a shot from his long gun.[13]

These accounts and my field investigations prove that the act of hunting lions and face-to-face combat with this wild animal was considered a prestigious act for the Bakhtiari men and heroes and their tribe. It is based on this belief and these circumstances that prestigious titles such as *shirkosh* (killer or hunter of lions), *shirmard* (lionish men) and *shir-e jangi* (lion-warrior) were used to distinguish valiant Bakhtiari men.[14]

Today many of the words of *gageriveh* (Bakhtiari traditional lamentations) and *shahnamehkhani* tell the stories of the men who bear these titles. In these stories, the men have gone to war with their enemies with the bravery of a lion; they have defended their family and their camp and have lost their lives in these wars. The act of hunting the lion and going to war with this animal, as well as scenes recited in the lamentations today, reveal to us some essential reasons for the existence of the lion cult among the Bakhtiari.[15]

At the same time, in the texts written by Layard, we find another belief regarding the lion that was popular with the Bakhtiari. Indeed, Layard says

that the Bakhtiari, at that time, because of ideas and beliefs based on Iranian Shi'ism, believed in two kinds of lions:

> The Lurs divide lions into Musulmans and Kafirs (i.e. infidels). The first are of a tawny or light yellow colour, the second of a dark yellow, with black mane and black hair down the middle of the back. If they say a man is attacked by a Musulman lion he must take off his cap and very humbly supplicate the animal in the name of Ali to have pity upon him. The proper formula to be used on the occasion is the following: *Ai Gourba Ali, mun bendeh Ali am. As khana mun bigouzari. Be seri Ali.* "O cat of Ali, I am the servant of Ali. Pass by my house (or family) by the head of Ali."[16] The lion will then generously spare the suppliant and depart. Such consideration must not, however be expected from Kafir lions. The Lurs firmly believe in this absurd story.[17]

In another part of his book, Layard says:

> One afternoon when Mehemet Taki Khan was seated at the doorway of his castle with the elders, as was his wont, a man arrived breathless and in great excitement, declaring that in crossing the plain he had met a lion in his path. The beast, he said, was preparing to spring upon him, when he conjured it in the name of Ali to spare a poor unarmed man, who had never harmed any of its kin. Thereupon, the lion being a good Musulman and a Shi'a to boot, as some lions are believed to be, turned away and disappeared among some bushes.[18]

These accounts prove to us that the lives of the Bakhtiari really were in danger because of the existence of the wild lions in their regions, and it is perhaps for this reason that they created this kind of belief. Today, however, we find no more trace of it amongst the Bakhtiari.

The lion in *Shahnamehkhani*

Sorudkhani and *Shahnamehkhani* (recitation of the Book of Kings) are the names of the traditional lamentation sung by the men and professional lamenters (Bakhtiari and non-Bakhtiari) to mourn the death of the beloved and great men of the Bakhtiari.

Interviews conducted with the Bakhtiari and an analysis of the episodes of the *Shahnameh* chosen by professional singers indicate that these songs were originally held exclusively for the great men of the tribe: *shirmard* (lionish men) who had shown outstanding courage and bravery (i.e. like a lion) or had an impressive social status.

The version of the *Shahnameh* that the Bakhtiari sing as a lamentation is totally different from the existing version of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The

traditional singers choose some part of the text of the original *Shahnameh* and add new verses in the beginning, middle or end of their singing.

The lyrics of the Bakhtiari's *Shahnameh* lamentation mostly describe scenes that are very prominent in tradition. It should be mentioned that the nomadic way of life inevitably created certain responsibilities for the men of the tribe, which have become fixed in the society's mentality, including the supervision of the tribe's affairs; the defence of the women and children against wild animals, thieves and highwaymen; and the care of the cattle.

Today one can identify such scenes in the lyrics of the *Shahnameh* in the use of lamentations amongst the Bakhtiari. Scenes of war, such as those of *pahlavans* (heroes), *khans* (chiefs), tribes with enemies and wild animals (e.g. the lion) are the most popular subjects of *Shahnamehkhani*.

Following is an example of *Shahnamehkhani* for a Bakhtiari chief who was very popular during his life.[19]

In the name of the Lord of both wisdom and mind,

به نام خداوند جان و خرد،

To nothing sublimer can thought be applied,

کزین اندیشه بر نگذرد،

The Lord of whatever is named or assigned,

خداوند نام و خداوند جان،

A place, the Sustainer of all and the Guide,

خداوند روزیُ و رهنمای،

The Lord of Saturn and the turning sky,

خداوند کیهانُ وگردون سپهر،

Who causeth Venus, Sun, and Moon to shine,

فروزنده ماه و ناهیدُ و مهر،

Ferdowsi, the noble birth, recites,

چنین گفت فردوسی پاکزاد،

Blessing goes to his tomb [i.e. Ferdowsi],

که رحمت برآن تُربت پاک باد،

Everyone who recites [i.e. reads] the *Shahnameh*,

هرآن کس که شاهنامه خوانی کند،

Even a woman, can be a hero,[20]

اگرزن بوُد پهلوانی کند،

If the earth began to talk of its secrets,

زمین گر گشاده کند راز خویش،

After all it would let us know the history of its creation,

نماید سرانجام آغاز خویش،

You would find [i.e. among its secrets] the history
of many who have been crowned,

کنارش پُرازتاجداران بُود،

Also the accounts of the blood of many riders [i.e. dead heroes], [21]

بَرَش پُرزخون سواران بُود

No one can retain his fortune and lucky days forever,

که بَرکس نماند همی روز بخت،

Nor his treasures, his crown, nor also his kingdom,

نه گنجُ، نه دیهیم، نه شاهُ، نه تخت،

Therefore, in this world simply possessing a good
name is useful,

همی نام جاوید باید به کام،

Abandon your wishes and simply try to create a
good name for yourself, [22]

بیانداز کامُ وبرافراز نام،

Alas, alas,

ای دادُ و بیداد،

I hear a very painful song from afar, it says:

سرُآیند یکی قصّه ای دردناک :

all of the warlike lions are sleeping, [23]

که شیران جنگی بخُفتند به خاک،

If I wanted to tell you stories about the lions,

ز شیران اگر من حکایت کنم،

I could write more than two hundred books, [24]

به دفتر دویست سَر روایت کنم،

When the thicket becomes empty of lions,

چو بیشه تُهی گشت از نرّه شیر،

So you will see jackals there, [25]

شُغالان درآیند به بیشه دلیر،

O you, the athletic lion's son, lion's whelp,

که ای پهلوان زاده بچّه شیر،

No mother could give birth to a more lion-hearted,
brave and athletic son than you, [26]

نـزآیـد دگـر چـو تـو شیـرمـرد و دلـیـر،

During hard times do not be hopeless,

بـه هنـگام سختـی مشو نـا امـیـد،

From the black cloud [i.e. always] we will have
clear and clean water, [27]

زابـرسیـه بـارد آب سپید،

Nothing good can be created by one hand alone,

زدست تُـهی بـرنـیـایـد هُـنـر،

If the neck of the male lion (*shir-e nar*) is broken, [28]

اگـر بـشکـنـد گـردن شیـر نـر،

When in the mountains, lion, I call out your name,
the mountains tremble,

بـه کـوه، شیـر لـرزد زنـامـت هنـوز،

It makes no difference where you are,
whether it is night or day,

چـه فـرقـست پـیشت شب است یـا کـه روز

I seek the tracks of their horses,

کـنم جُستجو رد اسبـانـشان،

The place where they come to a halt has
the scent of their zeal, [29]

دهد بـوی غیـرت جـای اُطـراقـشان،

Alas, where are all the male lions?

دریـغـا کـجا آنهمـه شیـرنـر؟

The Berno[30] firearms and bay horses?

تـفـنـگهـای بِـرنُـوو اسبـان کـهـر؟

That plant which grows everywhere
[i.e. in the mountains and in the fields],

گـیـاهی کـه رویـد زبـوم و زبَـر،

Gives zeal the scent of male lions,

دهد بـوی غیـرت زشیـران نـر،

Choqakhor, Andika, Golgir and Lali,

چغـاخُـور، انـدیـکـا، گـلـگیـرو لالـی،

All have become empty of male lions, [31]

تـمـام از نَـره شیـران گـشتـه خـالـی،

Add a mark in the history of Iran,

به تاریخ ایران زنید این رغم،

Greatness is left in our men,

بزرگی زمردان ما گشته کم،

From the nimble unique rider [i.e. riders]
of Great Persia [i.e. Bakhtiari country],

ازآن تکسوارایران زمین،

Alas, [i.e. also] from those brave hanged men (*sarbedar*),

دریغا ازآن سربداران دلیر،

From brave celebrated men, now, one is left,

زنام آوران نام داری برفت،

From nimble riders, now, one is left,[32]

زچابُکسواران سواری برفت،

Alas, from these days of bad fortune,

ای دادوبیداد از این روزگار،

Alas, from these days of bad fortune,

ای دادوبیداد از این روزگار،

What happened to the memory of:
good days, companions and heroes?

یاد ایام، یاد یاران، یادمردان را چه شد؟

Why does nobody talk any more about lions?

صحبت شیران را چه شد؟

What happened to that great hero of warriors?[33]

آن یل دلیران را چه شد؟

Two fighters, two men, two brave lions,

دوجنگی، دو مرد و دو شیردلیر،

I do not know whose back will touch the earth.

چه دانم که پُشت که آید به زیر؟

In such a battlefield with the presence of
these two roaring lions,

چنین رزمگاهی که غُران دوشیر،

Who are fighting with such bravery,

بجنگند ودرآیند هر دو دلیر،

Even if a year has one thousand days,

اگر سال گردد فزون ازهزار،

Still this is the way and this is the work [i.e. war]

همین است راهُ و همین است کار.

Lion tombstones

Shir-e sangi, traditionally named *bard-e shir*, are a specific form of Iranian nomadic gravestone that are mostly found in the west, south-west and parts of southern Iran, among Lor and Qashqai nomads (Figures 79 and 80). The study of the lion tombstones of the Bakhtiari has never been undertaken, and because of the absence of written sources related to this topic, the development of any research would need to incorporate field researches on the lions. Furthermore, oral traditions will play an important role in establishing the function of the stone lions among the Bakhtiari.[34]

These funerary animal sculptures can be found in the many valleys and along the migration routes of the Zagros Mountains; for example, in Lali, Shinbar and Bazoft (Khuzestan), and at Zard-e Kuh, the highest point of the Zagros Mountains (Chaharmahal va Bakhtiari).

Either solitary or occurring in groups, they strikingly mark the graves of unknown chiefs and warriors who have died in local battles. The number of lions varies tremendously among cemeteries, a fact that raises questions concerning the relationship between the location of these lions and the wealth and sacredness of the individual whose grave they mark.



Figure 79 Lion Tombstone, Cholvar Cemetery, Cholvar, Khuzestan, Iran © P. Khosronejad 2003.



Figure 80 Lion Tombstone, Cholvar Cemetery, Cholvar, Khuzestan, Iran © P. Khosronejad 2003.

The long history of stone-lion construction among the Bakhtiari is difficult to account for. Within the last century, however, two developments have been observed. First, by the mid twentieth century, stone lions ceased to be constructed. Second, within the last few years, they have reappeared in new contexts (Figure 81).[35] Both of these developments point to significant shifts in the way the Bakhtiari have responded to changes in their recent history. The lions are both specific examples, and also more generally representative, of the identity and culture of the Bakhtiari. They were mostly made by professional, non-Bakhtiari stonemasons who travelled seasonally among Bakhtiari territories.[36]

Many lion tombstones are found concentrated in cemeteries that also contain *Imamzadeh*. *Imamzadeh* are scattered throughout Bakhtiari territory and usually designate the shrine of Bakhtiari saints and holy men of certain clans. Of the approximately 150 cemeteries that I have visited (1997–2007), many were constructed around the shrines of these holy men. In Islamic tradition, burial near these holy shrines is believed to help gain the intercession of the saint on the *qiyāmat* (Day of Judgement). Particular saints can be associated with certain miracles or cures.[37]



Figure 81 Lion Tombstone, Konarshah Cemetery, Lali, Khuzestan, Iran © P. Khosronejad 2009.

Elaborate customs are involved in the veneration of these sites, which often find parallels with those of the venerations of stone lions. Lions, not just those at these mortuary sites, are frequently the object of such veneration.[38]

Lion tombstones as the object of bravery rituals

In bygone centuries, lion tombstones were definitely the main symbolic and sacred objects of bravery rituals. Even if today we cannot see many rituals directly attached to the lion tombstones, some travellers, including David Brooks, have recounted their observations in this regard.

> Stone lions figure in a particular ritual for men who are not complete men, i.e. cowards (*tarsu*). Several nomads described this ritual to me, although they suggested it was very rarely done because there were not many cowards among the Bakhtiari![39]

During his visits among the Bakhtiari, David heard a description of such a ritual, although he never saw it with his own eyes:

> The coward is taken by his friends to the graveyard on a night of full moon and, while saying prayers to the dead hero, passes

> seven times under the stone lion, between its legs. A prayer is supposed to be said for every 'circumambulation'. The afflicted man is also supposed to crouch under the lion and pray for bravery (*deliri*, *shojā'at*). I was assured it worked. This potency to bring about a transformation, to cure an affliction, is more usually the prerogative of sacred places, of the *emāmzādeh* or shrines scattered irregularly in the mountains.[40]

Women also consult lions or through them ask God to give them a boy or a brave boy like Imam Ali, the *Shir-e khodā* (the Lion of God).[41] Rosukh also describes another attachment of Bakhtiari women to these lions:

> The failure to give birth to a child sucks for these women. Consequently, the most popular rituals associated with the lion are related to this concern. In the village of Dezzak (i.e. Chahar-Mahal va Bakhtiari), for example, women visit the site of a specific lion to ask for children. The lion, the oldest in the village, stands on a small mound at the edge of the cemetery closest to the main road. On Wednesday, women walk under it three times to get pregnant. Women also tie strings around it to get pregnant. In villages throughout the Bakhtiari similar rituals are told.[42]

For the most part, sons are being asked for, rather than daughters. However, Massé writes that the latter can also be requested through a similar ritual in which a handkerchief is wrapped around the lion's head.[43]

Concluding remarks

The lion as symbol continues to have an enduring significance today, recorded in Bakhtiari oral tradition, funeral material culture and history. Concerning lion tombstones among the Bakhtiari, Brooks says:

> These stylized sculptured lions stare out from numerous isolated Bakhtiari graveyards. Sometimes singly, sometimes in clusters, they proudly mark the graves of important men, in particular warriors who have died in battle. These vigilant lions represent bravery, manliness and male powers in riding, hunting or fighting, and are permanent visible symbols of the most highly prized male qualities. They stand testament to what all Bakhtiari men aspire to be.[44]

Today lion tombstones are 'objects of' as well as 'objects for' the representation of Bakhtiari heroic identity and culture. In the absence of a written history, the stone lions are one way in which the Bakhtiari are able to reconstruct their past.

Additionally, as with many other parts of folklore, lamentations have important characteristics: they reflect the life of the given people, the realities of the society in which the lamentation is composed, and they are an aesthetic phenomenon. Therefore, they are the object of both ethnography and philology.

> Mourning poetry is at the same time the most archaic genre of oral folk literature, since if wedding and military songs, lullabies, etc. change their form and content with the evolution of society, with the change of social-economic relations, the attitude towards the death, as a constant value, has remained almost unchanged. Being closely connected with the burial rites which are the most conservative elements of the ritual system, mourning songs preserve the oldest elements of already disappeared cults, forgotten beliefs and superstitions, vestiges of extinct social institutions. Thus, they represent a unique base for the reconstruction of the various aspects of cultural history and psychology of the peoples.[45]

Songs and ceremonies associated with funereal traditions, such as *Shahnamehkhani*, traditional lamentations, are extremely important in recording the events of the Bakhtiari's past related to these lions. Thus, the symbol of the lion evokes for the Bakhtiari the memory of an idealised past wrought with heroics and wars, which stands in striking contrast to their contemporary situation.

We know that one of the titles of the Imam Ali, the first Shi'i Imam, was *Asadollah*, which means Lion of God or *Shir-e khodā* in Persian. In Iranian Shi'i beliefs, the title *Shir-e khodā* first means the Imam Ali, and second, a brave man who has quite an important and significant place in society. In past times, this title was used in the majority of cases for the *pahlavan* (the heroes) and the *luti* (the brave men), who were without doubt good Muslims and dedicated their lives to their community.

The visual symbol of the lion is also one of the most important and profound elements of the cult of Iranian Shi'ism, especially in the context of the Moharram, the month of mourning for the Imam Hoseyn, *salar-e shahidan*, (the prince of martyrs) and his followers. The existence of the symbol of the lion in the Iranian Shi'i world comes from a belief and popular legend portraying the Imam Ali and a lion.

> These popular images illustrate a tale which tells how on his return from battle Imam Ali saved a lion who had fallen into a water cistern. The lion became quite attached to the First Imam, and followed

> him wherever he went. This same lion went to help Imam Hoseyn at Karbala, but arrived after the tragedy had occurred.[46]

Based on this story, today we find the representation of this sacred animal in different forms in the material culture of Iranian Shi'ism. In the form of a motif, it appears alone on flags, and on the walls of the *Imamzadeh* and of holy places. In the illustrations of the sacred manuscripts, it is often presented with the Imam Ali and his two sons, the Imam Hoseyn and the Imam Hasan.[47] In the form of an object, we find statuettes of the lion amongst other animal statuettes of the *alam* (the banner) used in rituals and ceremonies during the month of Moharram,[48] and we also find this animal in the form of levers and padlocks on the ancient doors of the *Imamzadeh*.[49] In all of these cases, the symbol of the lion is linked to two phenomena: firstly, the bravery and valour of the Imam Ali as a warrior; and, secondly, the protection of the Imam Ali and of his family, especially the Imam Hoseyn (*salar-e shahidan*).

With these explanations, we can better understand the existence of this belief regarding Muslim lions and non-Muslim lions amongst the Bakhtiari in past times. The attachment of the Imam Ali to the animal of the lion for the Bakhtiari finds its roots and causes without a doubt in the title of this Shi'i Imam (*Shir-e khodā*) and the history of the lion that accompanied the Imam Ali in different religious images.

In the original story, it is the Imam Ali who saved the life of this lion, and from then on this lion becomes a guardian for him and his family. We do not know how the Bakhtiari could have been aware of this legend, but we strongly believe that they were inspired by this story to create the legend of Muslim and non-Muslim lions in their territory. Here, the Imam Ali plays the role of a mediator between the real animal of the lion and the Bakhtiari. The Bakhtiari beseech this wild animal, in the name of Ali, to save their life, and if the lion is a Muslim lion and loyal to the Imam Ali, he accepts the request for forgiveness.

It is interesting to add that amongst the lions of our corpus, many are coloured in yellow (Plate 11). Layard also points out that the Bakhtiari believe that Muslim lions are light yellow and that non-Muslim lions are dark, almost black. It is possibly in accordance with this idea of the Bakhtiari that stone lions are coloured in this way.

Today the lion as a symbol is a bitter source of pride for the Bakhtiari, a constant reminder of the changes to the very foundations of their life and culture that have occurred over the last few centuries.

In the absence of written history, oral traditions are one medium through which the Bakhtiari construct their past. Songs and ceremonies associated

with the funeral traditions have a larger importance and help to reconstruct some part of the Bakhtiari's identity.

Continued analysis of the contemporary oral and funerary traditions in Bakhtiari society will create a rich structure of detailed ethnographic and anthropological evidence for anthropologists interested in nomadic life in Iran. This evidence includes not only information on the property, social status and prestige of the Bakhtiari, but also on non-orthodox rituals and beliefs.

> When the lion shows his teeth do not think that the lion smiles!
> Even when he smiles don't be secure: he will be more
> bloodthirsty.
>
> M. 13039.[50]

Notes

1. I would like to thank Houtan Foundation and the Soudavar Memorial Foundation for their long-term financial support during the writing of this chapter, my PhD in France and also in the United Kingdom.
2. Quoted in D. Brooks' unpublished manuscripts. Originally quoted in Schimmel 1978, p. 155.
3. Garthwaite 1983, p. 16.
4. Layard 1894,p. 380.
5. Etemad 1985, pp. 188–193.
6. Ibid., p. 192.
7. Sir Austen Henry Layard (5 March 1817–5 July 1894) was a British traveller, archaeologist, cuneiformist, art historian, draughtsman, collector, author and diplomatist, best known as the excavator of Nimrod. Layard 1887, p. 189.
8. Ibid., p. 190.
9. Ibid., p. 190.
10. Ibid., p. 189.
11. Ibid., p. 185.
12. Ibid., p. 185.
13. Ibid., p. 190.
14. For example, one of the very popular Bakhtiari legends is dedicated to *Shiralimardan 'the hero'*, one of the national heroes of the Bakhtiari.
15. For further information regarding the cult of the lion in Bakhtiari lamentations, see Khosronejad: 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006a, 2006b.
16. *'Ey Gorbey-e Ali, man bandey-e Ali hastam, az khun-e man behkhāter-e sar-e Ali begzar'.*
17. Layard 1894, p. 189.
18. Ibid., p. 185.
19. Some lyrics of *Shahnamehkhani*, recited by Master Behruz Ahmadi in his home in Masjed Soleyman during my fieldwork in 2004.

20. In Bakhtiari society most of the heroic stories talk about male heroes (*pahlavan*). Generally speaking, in Iranian popular culture women are presented as weak (*za'ifeh*) and fearful (*tarsu*). Here, therefore, the importance of the Book of Kings, the *Shahnameh*, and its stories are emphasised: 'This book is for heroes and those who would like to be and live like heroes, even if its readers are women.'
21. Here the singer is saying that the *Shahnameh* is one of the most complete written histories of the world (i.e. Persia) and that those who read it can find in it many secrets (*rāz*) from the early periods of Iranian history, such as stories about lucky kings and princes (*tājdārān*). However, not all the world's stories (i.e. the *Shahnameh*) have happy endings; it also contains sad stories about wars and the death (i.e. *khun*) of brave men and heroes (*savārān*). Here, as these lyrics are recited as lamentation, the singer is announcing the death of an important man.
22. In this life, all creatures will die one day and no one can retain their title, goods or money in the other world, not even a king (*shah*). Therefore, try to be a kind person and create a good reputation for yourself in this world; then, after your departure, all will commemorate you and your kind acts.
23. Someone is saying, 'I am hearing a very sad and deep weeping – *gageriveh* – from afar as the sign of the death of the great men of the clan. All of them (*shiran-e jangi*) are sleeping on the ground.' In Persian literature, sleeping or lying down on the earth (*behkhoftand beh khāk*) is the sign of death. Here again the lamenter announces to us that we are at the funeral ceremony of one of the great men of society.
24. Amongst the Bakhtiari, there are many stories about the bravery of lionlike men (*shirmardan*) who have sacrificed their lives for their tribe. Therefore, no one can collect all these stories in only one book.
25. When there are no more brave men and heroes – lions – in our tribe (i.e. all have been killed), it is a good time for hypocritical people (i.e. *riyākār*) to show themselves in society. In Persian literature the jackal symbolises a hypocritical person.
26. Alas, for the departure of these young heroes of the tribe (*bacheh shir*) and the brave men who died on the battlefield. They were the last generation of our idols and society will no longer see the likes of such lion-hearted men.
27. Do not worry if brave men and heroes are no longer amongst us, for one day we will have heroes and warriors amongst us again.
28. After the death (*garden-e shekasteh*) of the lion-hearted men and the heroes of the tribe, how can the tribe alone (*dast-e khāli*) resist its enemies? The lamenter is saying that with the departure of this great man, the tribe will be left without a chief and hero; what shall be done without him?
29. Even today, after your death (*shirmardan*), when we talk about you and your heroic life the whole of the Bakhtiari tribe will be impassioned. Today, even though you are not amongst us, in every single place where you have passed by with your horses or where you fought we can still hear of your bravery.

30. One type of Mauser rifle that was selected for the Iranian army during Reza shah's time. But Iran didn't go for the original German and ordered the identical Czechoslovakian version, the so-called Brno. These rifles are known to collectors as Persian CZ98, Persian Mauser or Persian Brno. The rifle was especially cherished by Iranian tribes, who are known to be gun lovers and able shooters. A tribesman sharpshooter would settle for nothing less than a Brno. Tribal rebels did everything to acquire one of these rifles, and they did get their hands on these in many tribal wars during Reza shah and Mohammad Reza shah's time. And probably the tribal chieftains, or khans, did get shipments from foreign sources, to be distributed among their *savars* (mounted fighters). One single event, which contributed to the widespread availability of Brno rifles among the tribes in Iran, was the fall of Reza shah following the invasion of Iran by the Allied forces in 1941. At that time the Iranian army, after a short resistance, was almost disbanded and many people, especially tribesmen, got hold of the Brnos left after the soldiers abandoned the barracks. There are many stories of the gun's accuracy among the tribes [i.e. the Bakhtiari]. When Dadshah rebelled against the shah's government in Baluchistan in the 1950s, people said that his wife, Bibi Khatoon, who accompanied him in the mountains, at one occasion, took her Brno and shot a bullet right into the barrel of the gun of a poor gendarme who was aiming at her at a long distance. Its popularity among Iranian tribes was so much that it was mentioned in some of their songs. A version of a well-known Boyer Ahmad song has a refrain that says *'Mastom, Mastom, Brno kootah be dastom'* (I'm drunk and have a short Brno in my hand). http://www.aliparsa.com/brno/brno.html (18 March 2009).
31. Alas, today there are no longer any heroes and brave men (*shir-e nar*) amongst the Bakhtiari. In their absence (i.e. death) their beautiful and prestigious horses (*asbeh kahar*) and their firearms (*tofanghāy-e berno*) have also disappeared. Today in Bakhtiari society one can no longer find any brave men who keep the zeal (*gheyrat*) of tribal society; only a few places and only a few people can remind one of their bravery. In Choqakhor, Andika, Golgir and Lali, where these great Bakhtiari heroes once lived, not even one of them (*shir-e nar*) can be found.

    After the mass disarmament of the nomads of Iran in general, and in this particular case the Bakhtiari (1923), they were forced to settle. Much oral poetry and history exists among the Bakhtiari that relates, 'Since our men had no more firearms and no more good horses, they preferred to die rather than to live like women'. There is a famous Bakhtiari saying: 'A Bakhtiari man should be born on the back of a horse [i.e. a rider] with a firearm in his hand [i.e. a fighter], and should also die in the same position.' Since those days, there have been no serious wars and battles in which Bakhtiari men could prove their bravery; therefore, this piece of poetry can also be interpreted as a reminder of these periods of the Bakhtiari's lives, when they no longer possessed firearms (*berno*) or good, prestigious horses.

32. This part of the lamentation tells us that we should include in the history of Persia (i.e. Bakhtiari society) the sad reality that there are no more great men, heroes and chiefs among us. Whereas one day there were many brave men and warriors, today most of them have died on the battlefield or have been assassinated (*sarbedār*) by enemies. Today we are present in this funeral ceremony because again one of our great heroes has left us forever; he was one of the greatest and best-known warriors (*chāboksavār*).
33. This part of the lamentation relates that today we are living in hard times and times of bad fortune in which there are no longer any heroes and warriors (*dalirān*, *shirān*), and asks why no one tries to keep their good memory and the history of their bravery in mind.
34. For further information on this subject, see Khosronejad 2007.
35. Khosronejad 2007, pp. 2–14.
36. Ibid., pp. 270–300.
37. Brooks 2002, pp. 91–111.
38. Based on my own field researches.
39. Bishop 2004, vol. 2, p. 75.
40. Brooks 2002, p. 101.
41. Khosronejad 2007, pp. 478–483. The word for lion is also used in rare cases to signify powerful, even aggressive women in the term of *shirzan* (lion woman). The linguistic use of lion, the symbol of maleness, for a woman clearly signifies the unusual and anomalous qualities of such women. The paradigm for the term *shirzan* is Zeynab, the *shirzan* of Karbala, the daughter of Imam'Ali and sister of the martyred third Imam, Hoseyn**,** who is so central to Shi'ite Islam. (Brooks: unpublished manuscript)
42. Rosoukh 1995–6, p. 36.
43. Massé 1938, pp. 114–118.
44. Brooks 2002, pp. 91–111.
45. Vahman and Asatrian 1995, pp. 26–27.
46. Tanavoli 1985, p. 24.
47. Ibid., pp. 23–29.
48. For further information regarding the (*alam*) in Iran, see Allan and Gilmour 2001, pp. 253–281.
49. For further information regarding levers and padlocks in Iran, see Allan 2000, pp. 402–419.
50. Quoted in Brooks 2002, p. 315, originally after Schimmel 1978, p. 107.

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The Iconography of Ali as the Lion of God in Shi'i Art and Material Culture

Fahmida Suleman

Introduction

ACCORDING TO A POPULAR SHI'I TRADITION relating to the tragedy at Karbala (680), as the martyrs lay dying on the field their enemies were about to trample over the corpses on horseback when suddenly a lion appeared and frightened the horses away, thus protecting the bodies of Imam Hoseyn and his family from further harm. As a result of traditions of this kind, lions, or men wearing lion costumes, are often included as part of the Moharram processions in various parts of the Persian-speaking world.[1] A translation of a verse from an early twentieth-century Azerbaijani poem attests to the importance attached to the symbol of the lion in Shi'i *Ashura* literature and ceremony:

> O Lion, come today to our help,
> Help the children of Mostafa [i.e. the Prophet Mohammad]!...
> Come, pass by the place of slaughter,
> Look at the corpses of the martyrs.
> Go to the Lion of God [*Shir-e Khoda,* i.e. Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb], tell him. Beg him to come to Karbala. O Lion, come today to our help,
> Help the children of Mostafa![2]

The lion motif occurs as a symbol of benevolent strength in *ta'ziyeh* (passion play), devotional literature centred on the figure of Imam Hoseyn (d. 680). However, it is with the figure of Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb (d. 661) himself that the image of the lion is inextricably connected, in both Sunni and Shi'i traditions, from as early as the tenth century to the present day. The

purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the iconography of Ali as the lion of God, and the related image of the lion and sun, can be traced back to Shi'i contexts as early as the tenth century, and how this multilayered iconography developed and flourished in the mediaeval period through artistic and literary endeavours, culminating in the nineteenth century as the royal emblem of the Lion and Sun in Qajar Iran.

Visual expressions of the Lion of God

Among his numerous appellations, Ali is known in mediaeval Arabic and Persian literature as *Asadollah* (the bold and daring Lion of God), as *Shir-e Khoda* (the Lion of God) and, more frequently, as *Haydar* or *Haydara* (the King of Lions).[3] This association has also been expressed in visual artistic form. A striking calligraphic depiction of Ali as the lion of God is from an early twentieth-century composition produced in Ottoman Turkey and now part of the Khalili collection (Figure 82).

The lion is formed from the letters of an Arabic calligraphic inscription (*Bismi-Asadollah, wajh Allah, al-ghalib Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb*), which translates as, 'In the name of the Lion of God, the face of God, the victorious Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb'. This particular composition is probably

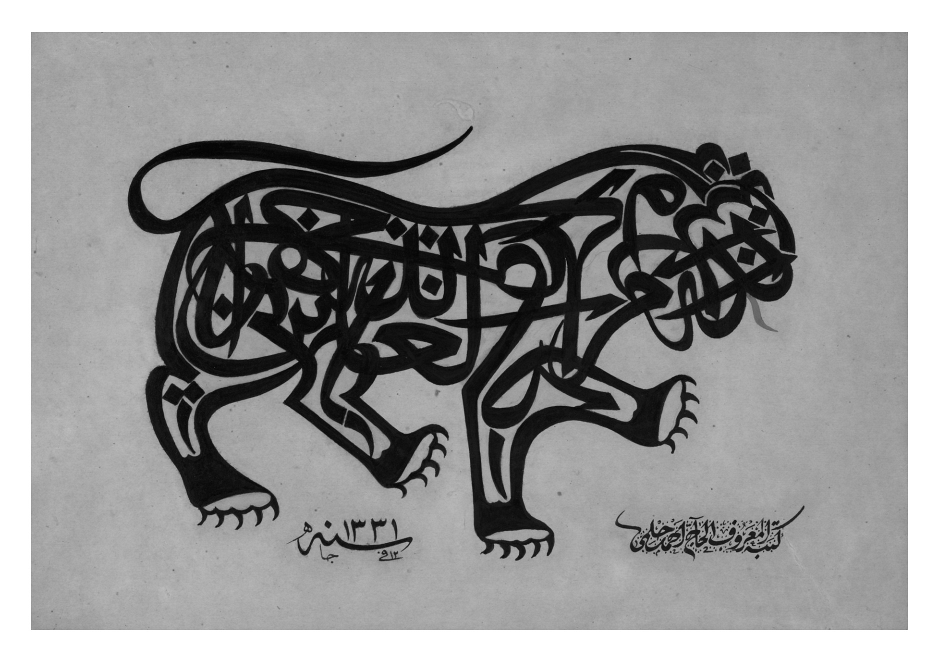


Figure 82 Calligraphic lion by Ahmed Hilmi. Black ink and coloured pigments on card, 26.5 × 38.8 cm. Ottoman Turkey, 1331 AH/1913 AD. Courtesy of The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London, acc. no. CAL 242.

based on earlier examples from Bektashi Sufi contexts. According to De Jong's study of Bektashi iconography, the five-clawed paws of the lion represent the *ahl-e beyt*: the Prophet Mohammad, Ali, Fatemeh, Hasan and Hoseyn. The lion's red tongue symbolises Mohammad, who, in Bektashi theology, was the *natiq*, or spokesman, of Ali. Finally, the golden yellow tail of the lion symbolises Ali, in accordance with the tradition in which Hoseyn said at the beginning of the battle of Karbala: 'Ali was the gold, Fatemeh was the silver, I am the son of the gold and silver. My father was the sun, my mother was the moon. I am the son of the sun and the moon.'[4]

A more complex use of the lion as a symbol within a Shi'i context is from Qajar royal iconography. On both Qajar coins and royal orders, the image of a lion brandishing a sword in its right paw, or simply rendered lying down, is juxtaposed with the image of a rayed sun – often female-faced – emerging from behind it (Plate 12).[5]

Indeed, the iconography of the lion and sun appears on much earlier examples of Persian material culture from the Seljuk, Mongol and Timurid periods on metalwork, ceramics and manuscript painting.[6] However, most scholars agree that the image of the lion and sun in these earlier contexts represents the ancient astrological sign of Leo in the house of the sun and is therefore devoid of any religious symbolism. Consequently, by the time the Safavids came to power and proclaimed Ithna Ashari Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran in the early sixteenth century, the symbol of the lion and sun had become a familiar sign throughout their territories and the Safavids soon adopted the emblem as part of their royal insignia. The image of the lion and sun had been struck on copper coinage since early Safavid times, and it was incorporated into the dynasty's official banners and insignia by the time of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587–1629).[7] An etching from an eighteenth-century issue of the *Gazette de France* clearly depicts the lion and sun emblem on a royal banner, which formed part of the accoutrements of the Safavid delegation arriving at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles in 1715 (Figure 83). In Figure 83, Mohammad Reza Beg, mayor of Erevan and ambassador of the last Safavid shah Soltan Hoseyn (r. 1694–1722), is depicted in the centre foreground with his standard-bearer following behind him.[8]

The question thus arises, Was this well-known image also interpreted by the Safavids as a Shi'i symbol with special reference to Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb? The evidence seems to suggest that this was indeed the case.[9] The Safavids claimed their lineage directly from Ali. The first Safavid ruler, Shah Ismail, referred to himself as *gholam-e Haydar* or 'the slave of Haydar',



Figure 83 Safavid Lion and Sun banner carried as part of Mohammad Reza Beg's delegation to the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, 1715. Etching printed in the *Gazette de France*, eighteenth century. After Maurice Herbette, *Une Ambassade persane sous Louis XIV d'après des documents inédits*, Paris, Perrin, 1907, p. 115.

while Shah Abbas called himself *kalb-e astan-e Ali*, or 'the dog at Ali's threshold'.[10] Furthermore, according to Jean Chardin's eyewitness account, in addition to the emblem of the lion and sun the Safavids used the image of Zolfaqar – the legendary double-pointed sword of Ali given to him by the Prophet Mohammad – on their banners (Figure 84).[11] The emblem of a couchant lion in front of a rayed sun was maintained in Iran after the Safavid period (during the reign of Nader Shah and into the Zand period) and, in the early nineteenth century, Fath Ali Shah Qajar instituted the Persian Order of the Lion and Sun, which he conferred on foreign diplomats and officers (Plate 12).[12] By the end of Fath Ali Shah's reign, another variation of the emblem was developed – a passant lion brandishing the sword Zolfaqar – and both the older and newer versions appeared on various media and were

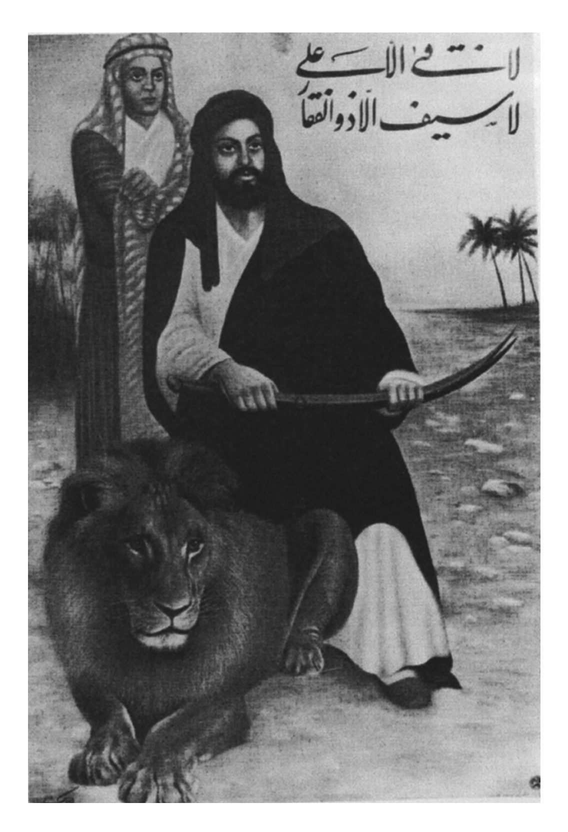


Figure 84 Folk painting of Imam Ali holding his double-pointed sword, Zolfaqar, while a lion sits by his feet and his faithful servant, Qanbar, stands behind him. Iran, twentieth century. After Parviz Tanavoli, *Lion Rugs: The Lion in the Art and Culture of Iran*, Basel and New York, [s.n.], 1985, p. 24, fig. 26. Published with kind permission from Parviz Tanavoli.

widely disseminated within and outside the Qajar state.[13] But is the origin of the symbol of the lion and sun indigenous to Iran? Were the Safavids the first to infuse it with Shi'i significance? To answer these questions, we must first turn to the origins of Ali's association as the lion of God in Muslim tradition.

Origins of Ali's appellation

The *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk,* or compendium of early Islamic history by the tenth-century historian and traditionist al-Tabari (d. 923), provides us with one of the earliest references to Ali as *Haydara* or the 'King of Lions.' This reference to Ali occurs in the entries relating the events of the expedition of Kheybar that took place in 7 AH/628 AD, during the episode in which Ali, as the Prophet's chosen standard-bearer, battles with Marhab, the valiant Jewish chieftain and master of the fortress of Kheybar. According to al-Tabari's account, when Ali came to the city of Kheybar, he faced his opponent, Marhab, and they exchanged the following words:[14]

> Kheybar knows well that I am Marhab –
> Whose weapon is sharp, a warrior tested.

Ali recited:

> I am he whose mother named him lion (*Haydara*):
> I will mete you out sword blows by the bushel –
> A lion (*laith*) in thickets, powerful and mighty.

Then, according to the account, Ali defeated Marhab with a sharp blow that split his opponent's skull in two and he swiftly took control of the city. Scholars have remarked that although Ali had also demonstrated his prowess during the battles of Badr and Uhud, his role at Kheybar astounded the Muslims and the events were greatly exaggerated in the sources, exalting him as the prototype of heroes.[15] For our purposes, according to Ali's alleged verses he derived the epithet of *Haydara* from his mother.

In Kamal al-Din al-Damiri's (d. 1405) *Kitab Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra*, a fourteenth-century *adab* work arranged as an animal encyclopaedia, we are presented with a further discussion on Ali's association with this epithet under the heading '*haydara*'. After quoting a similar tradition regarding the victory at Kheybar and Ali's exchange with Marhab, al-Damiri reports three possible explanations as to why Ali was accorded this particular epithet.[16] First, he confirms that *Haydara*

is an appropriate name for Ali because it is found in old books (*kutub al-qadima*) as one of the many names for the lion (*al-asad*). Second, according to al-Damiri, after Ali's birth, his mother, Fatemeh bint Asad, made the decision to name him after her father, who was called Asad, because Ali's father, Abu Taleb, was absent at the birth. However, upon his return, Abu Taleb instead chose to name his son Ali. Third, al-Damiri explains that Ali was given the nickname (*laqab*) of *Haydara* from a very young age because the type of lion it denotes is a corpulent-fleshed creature with a large belly (*mumtali' lahman al-azim al-batn*), which is how the young Ali was described.[17]

Lions and lion banners in the Fatimid realm

Thus, literary evidence suggests that Ali's association with the epithet *Haydara*, together with his rise as the hero par excellence, was popularised from the early tenth century onward.[18] Coincidentally, during this time the Abbasid regime faced increasing challenges to its claim as the universal caliphate of the Islamic world with the advent of several opposing Shi'i dynasties. One of these was the Ismaili Fatimid dynasty of North Africa, who, by the late tenth century, had taken control of large parts of North Africa, Egypt and Sicily. The Fatimids, as imam-caliphs, legitimised their rule as the restorers of 'Alid leadership of the Muslim *umma*, claiming it rightfully belonged to them as members of the Prophet's family through his daughter, Fatemeh, and his cousin and appointed successor, Ali. As Ismaili imams, they proclaimed religious leadership as the inheritors of the spiritual knowledge (*'ilm*) transferred by the Prophet to Ali and the subsequent imams, endowing them with an inner (*batin*) and an outer (*zahir*) understanding of the Qur'an and the sacred law of Islam.[19] The Fatimid panegyrist Ibn Hani al-Andalusi (d. 973) identifies the imam with Ali himself in the following verses:

> He came bearing with him the splendour of the sword
> Zolfaqar, as if he were adorned with its belt. To him has been
> given the excellence of the caliphate;
> To him has been vouchsafed the secret of inspiration. O blessed
> with contentment, the *khalifa* of God!
> O you whose path, minaret and book are in agreement![20]

The direct references to Ali's double-bladed sword, Zolfaqar,[21] his designation as the *khalifa* of God and the vouchsafing of the secret of the Qur'anic revelation all honour the imam poetically and theologically as the inheritor of Ali's strength, position and wisdom.

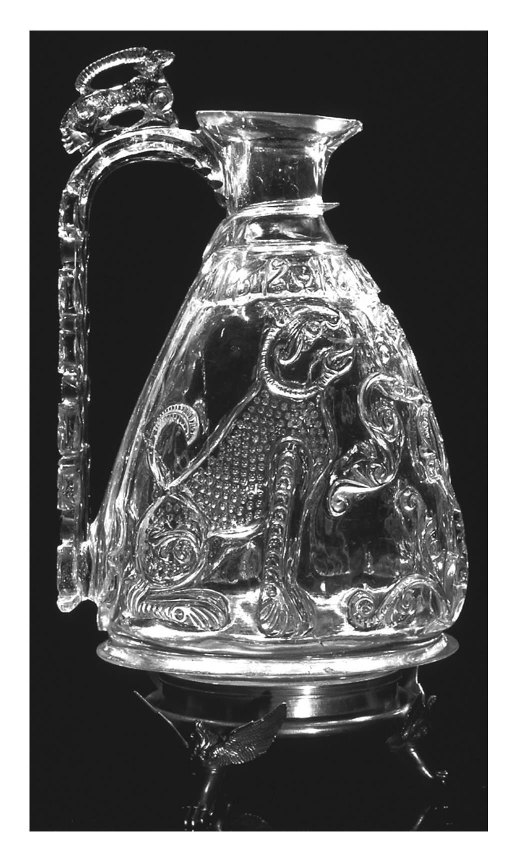


Figure 85 Rock crystal ewer dedicated to the Fatimid imam-caliph al-'Aziz billah decorated with seated lions, 18 cm (height), 12.5 cm (diameter), 2.5 mm (thickness). Egypt, 975–996 and with sixteenth-century European gold mounts. Published with kind permission from the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice, acc. no. 80.

The most immediate Fatimid association with a lion is the famous rock crystal ewer dedicated to the Fatimid imam-caliph al-'Aziz billah (r. 975–996), now housed at the Treasury of San Marco in Venice (Figure 85). Carved from a single piece of rock crystal, the main decoration on this piece comprises two seated lions on either side of the ewer, with the figure of a mountain goat seated at the top. The inscription on the vessel's shoulder reads: *Baraka min Allah li'l-imam al-'Aziz billah* (The blessings of God are for the imam al-'Aziz billah). The brief inscription bears al-'Aziz's spiritual title as imam, and not his political title as a caliph. Hence, one could argue that the lions signify al-'Aziz's declaration as the hereditary descendant of Ali, who was the first Shi'i imam-caliph and the 'Lion of God.'

There is also literary evidence to support a more specific interpretation of the lions on the ewer found in a *qasida* by Prince Tamim al-Fatimi, the brother of al-'Aziz billah, in which he praises the imam as follows:[22]

> He is the lion (*laith*) whose terrors and whose roar makes one forget the threats of all other lions....
> He belongs to those who are brave attackers in battle, to the steely-nerved shock troops.
> With the aid of the Prophet and his family, he ascended to the hills and mountains of elevation.
> With the aid of the *Wasi* [i.e. Ali],[23] he achieved a status that the stars themselves could never reach, though they were tense with the effort....
> He is a clear man of white hue who draws the white sword and then in time of war slays the heroes of war.
> He wades through the seas of battle to do battle, as the lion wades through pools among the rocks.
> He has become Fate in his predestination, so he is able to bring the mountain goats off the high mountains.[24]

These verses identify al-'Aziz billah as a brave and victorious lion assisted by the Prophet and Ali, while the imagery also brings to mind the verses that Ali recited during his battle with Marhab at Kheybar: 'I will mete you out sword blows by the bushel. A lion in thickets, powerful, mighty.' Thus, by employing the motif of the battling lion, Prince Tamim has poetically conflated the figures of Ali and al-'Aziz billah.

Lion imagery also appeared in Fatimid public ceremonial. The Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi (d. 1442) mentions that among the royal banners and flags of the Fatimids were two large standards shaped in the form of lions made of gold and red brocade. The author makes it quite clear that the banners were shaped as lion forms, and not as rectangular flags with images of lions on them. According to al-Maqrizi's description, two lion banners were included as part of the elaborate ceremonial procession celebrating the New Year, on the first of Moharram, during the reign of the caliph al-Amir (r. 1101–30). He reports:

> Two lances were taken out from the treasury, with crescents of solid gold on top. On each [lance] was a lion (*sabu'*), [one] made of red and [one] of yellow brocade. In the mouth of each was a ring, into which the wind would enter and puff them out to reveal their [lion] forms. These [lion banners] were carried by two horsemen of the elite guard.[25]

Therefore, the lion banners were, in fact, windsocks that created a three-dimensional display when held up high on procession. Lion-shaped banners made of golden-yellow brocade are also mentioned in the context of Fatimid ceremonial processions in the eleventh-century *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, thus attesting to a continuity of their use in Fatimid Egypt, at least between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[26] What did these lion banners symbolise? On one level, the two lion banners were carried as part of a military procession and would have overtly symbolised the militaristic power and ambitions of the dynasty. However, as Sanders' in-depth study on Fatimid ceremonial affirms, the Ismaili aspect of the Fatimids engendered multiple layers of meaning in various facets of their ceremonies by embodying both a *zahir* (exoteric) and a *batin* (esoteric) interpretation. The degree to which a spectator or participant of that ceremony had access to its esoteric interpretation depended on his or her level of initiation within Ismaili doctrine.[27] The esoteric symbolism of the lion banners is eloquently expressed in the poetry of the most famous Fatimid poet and *da'i*, Nasir-i Khusraw (d. *c.* 1077):[28]

> The two foundations of Islam are the Qur'an and Zolfaqar.
> As there is in human speech, no light but in Mohammad's word,
> Thus there is no sharp sword of fire, than Ali's sword.
> Mohammad, the Chosen, is the sun,
> And *Haydar-e karrar* [the attacking lion], is the light –
> Light cannot be without sun, sun cannot be without light.

Here, Nasir-i Khusraw combines the motifs of the lion, light and sun to express the esoteric relationship between Mohammad and Ali as understood by Fatimid Ismaili doctrine. The poet likens the Prophet to the sun, which represents the locus of Prophetic knowledge of the *batin* interpretation of the Qur'an, while Ali – the attacking lion – is the vehicle through which this knowledge is externally manifested like rays of light issuing from the sun. Many other Fatimid poets employed the motifs of the lion, light and sun in their poetry and it is therefore possible that such esoteric imagery, disseminated by the Ismaili poets of the eleventh century, was given visual expression in the form of the gold and red Fatimid lion banners.[29]

Although we lack the material evidence of the original gold and red lion banners, by happy coincidence Dr. Ruth Barnes, formerly from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, identified a large, rectangular, blue-and-white cotton lion banner, carbon dated to the tenth or eleventh century with a provenance of Fatimid Egypt (Figure 86). The material and finishing of the banner indicate that it was not produced for the court. However, this banner may have functioned as one of the decorative textiles described by



Figure 86 Lion banner. Cotton with tabby weave and appliqué, 39 cm × 47 cm. Egypt, tenth to eleventh century. Published with kind permission from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, acc. no. EA 1984.137, Department of Eastern Art, Newberry collection.

mediaeval historians that were used by the residents and shopkeepers of Fatimid Cairo to adorn their homes and shop-fronts during public holidays and court processions.[30]

Is it possible to connect the symbolism attached to lion banners in Fatimid Egypt with those in Qajar Iran? As a political force, Shi'ism met its demise in the Mediterranean region after the fall of the Fatimids. However, a major turning point in the development of Shi'ism occurred in the eastern Islamic lands following the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. During that period, both Ithna Ashari and Ismaili Shi'ism in Iran coalesced with Persian mystical Islam.[31] Hence, the esoteric themes and sentiments found in the eleventh-century poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw were newly expressed by a wider non-Ismaili Sufi or mystical section of society in the Persian-speaking lands. The mystical poetry of authors such as Sana'i (d. 1140), Farid al-Din Attar (d. *c.* 1220) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273)

perpetuated the motifs of the lion, sun and light. For example, Attar elevates Ali to the status of a sage in the following verses, mingling all three motifs of the lion, the sun and knowledge:

> How excellent the eye, the knowledge and the actions!
> How excellent the sun of the law, the full and swelling sea!
> The breath of the Lion of God penetrated to China; because of his knowledge, musk was produced in the navel of that musk-deer.
> Therefore they say: 'If you are a just and pious person,
> from Yathrib [Medina] go to China in search of knowledge.'
> Leo is the navel of the house of the sun,
> the pure musk is from the breath of that musk-deer.
> I am wrong, I speak not of the musk of Cathay,
> but that produced by the same-named, the Lion of God.
> Were his knowledge to take the form of the sea,
> the Black Sea would be only a single drop in it.[32]

Concluding remarks

The establishment of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 inaugurated a new era for Shi'ism that permanently changed the religious makeup of Iran. Subsequently, the association of the lion and sun motif in the Qajar era retained the symbolism expressed in the Fatimid period. I present two final examples of the symbol of Ali as the lion of God and the sun as a symbol of Prophetic and esoteric knowledge, which attest to the continuity of these motifs in the Qajar era. The first artefact, a lacquer mirror case made by Mohammad Ismail for Naser al-Din Shah in 1871, was produced within the realm of the court (Plate 13).

The complex iconography on this case includes as its central image a portrait of Imam Ali (holding Zolfaqar in his lap) surrounded by several historical personages, including the Prophet Mohammad riding his steed, Boraq (top), and Ali's sons, Hasan and Hoseyn (bottom left and right, respectively).[33] For our purposes, the ten Persian couplets of poetry inscribed along the border of the mirror case are most significant. They translate as follows:

> This is a portrait of the lion of God (*Shir-e Haqq*), God's vicegerent (*vali*) [on earth]. Or rather, he is the mirror that reflects God.
> When '*aql* [supreme intellect] saw the face of Ali, '*aql* said, 'he is the mirror of God's beauty.'

The manifestation of God's light is the beauty of Ali and within him is found the mystery of God's handiwork.
He is the one, the light of whose countenance imparts light and brilliancy to the sun.
He is the cause of the creation of time and the earth. He is the painter of earth and heaven.
His essence is not the essence of God, however, this pure pearl is from that ocean.
The dust of the horseshoes of Qambar's mount through honour imparts light to the eyes of the *houri*s of heaven.
Clutching his Zolfaqar he holds a dragon, just as in the talons of lions lie dragons.
The eye of the good fortune of the king Naser al-Din Shah, how long will it gaze upon this beautiful countenance?
Eternally from the beauty of his [Ali's] good fortune, the evil eye is kept blinded and at bay.[34]



Figure 87 Talismanic lithograph of Ali with a lion and sun, 19 × 22 cm. Iran, early twentieth century. After Parviz Tanavoli, *Lion Rugs: The Lion in the Art and Culture of Iran*, Basel and New York, [s.n.], 1985, p. 24, fig. 27. Published with kind permission from Parviz Tanavoli.

As the poetic verses indicate, the iconography of Ali as the Lion of God and the sun as his esoteric knowledge remained inextricably linked in the Qajar period. The second example of this continuity appears in an urban popular context with a depiction of an early twentieth-century talismanic lithograph of Imam Ali with Hasan and Hoseyn (Figure 87). In this depiction the images of the Shi'i imams are juxtaposed with the image of the lion and sun. Interestingly, the illustrator of this talisman covered the body of the lion with Qur'anic verses from the *Surat al-Shams* or the Chapter of the Sun (Q. 91), seamlessly merging an ancient astrological symbol with religious significance.

NOTES

1. *Ashura* is the tenth day of the month of Moharram, which is the anniversary of the martyrdom of Hoseyn, and it also designates the public mourning ceremonies performed by many Shi'i communities in various parts of the world during the first ten days of Moharram. The earliest recorded state-instituted *Ashura* ceremonies appear to have taken place in Baghdad during the Buyid period under Mu'izz al-Dawla in 963–964. On the *ta'ziyeh* passion plays and the history of *Ashura* mourning ceremonies, see Chelkowski *EI*2, vol. X, pp. 406–408. See also the various articles on *ta'ziyeh* in Iran in Chelkowski 1979.
2. Translation from Clara Edwards's study of early twentieth-century Azerbaijani poetry: Edwards 1919, pp. 115–116.
3. Translations from Lane 1997, under *asad* and *haydar*. According to Lane, Arab writers, such as the Ikhwan al-Safa, have mentioned the existence of more than 500 names for the lion in Arabic, each having its own nuanced meaning (e.g. *al-Usama*, 'the noble beast'). See Lane, *Lexicon*, under '*asad*', Book 1, Part 1, pp. 56–57. See also Kindermann, *EI*2, vol. I, pp. 681–683.
4. See De Jong 1989, pp. 12–13. For an alternate reading of this piece, see Rogers 2002, cat. no. 207.
5. For the history of this piece, see Wright 1979, pp. 135–141; idem 1981, pp. 179–180. See also Diba 1998, cat. no. 55, p. 204; Piotrovsky and Rogers 2004, cat. no. 128, p. 178.
6. See, for example, a sun with three human faces emerging behind a lion on a brass ewer from Khorasan dated to the Seljuk period in Louvre 2001, cat. no. 58, pp. 84–86. A lion and a human-faced sun also appear on a Mongol lustre star tile dated 665 AH/1267 AD that originally decorated the walls of the Imamzadeh Ja'far at Damghan (Louvre AO no. 6319). For an example in manuscript painting from the Jalayirid period, see Carboni 1988, fol. 9v and illustration 5.
7. Shahbazi, *EIr*, vol. X, p. 19.
8. After Herbette 1907, p. 115. See also Shahbazi, *EIr*, vol. X, p. 19.
9. This is not to say that the symbol lost its astrological significance as the sign of Leo in the house of the sun during the Safavid period. See, for example, a

Safavid blue and white underglazed dish decorated with astrological signs in Berlin 2001, p. 174.

10. Shahbazi, *EIr*, vol. X, p. 21. In his excellent article, Shahbazi also argues that the Safavids reinterpreted the ancient symbol of the lion as representing Ali as the lion of God. However, his analysis differs from mine in that he associates the sun with 'the "glory of religion", the ancient *farr-e-din*.' For the history of the Safavids and their imposition of Twelver Shi'ism as a state religion, see Morgan 1988, esp. pp. 118–123.
11. Shahbazi, *EIr*, vol. X, pp. 20–21. The representation of Zolfaqar was also used on banners in Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India. See Rogers 2002, cat. no. 81, p. 137.
12. Shahbazi, *EIr*, vol. X, pp. 21–22. See also Wright 1979, pp. 135–141.
13. For an enamelled dish dated 1233 AH/1817–18 AD with the emblem, see Diba 1998, cat. no. 53, p. 202.
14. This hadith was transmitted through Abu Kurayb – Yunus b. Bukayr – al-Musayyab b. Muslim al-Awdi – 'Abdallah b. Buraydah – and to his father (Buraydah b. al-Husayb), who heard it from the Prophet Mohammad. I have used the translation by Fishbein 1997, pp. 120–121. This translation corresponds to al-Tabari 1879–1901, vol. 1, part 3, pp. 1579–1581.
15. Vaglieri, *EI*[2], vol. IV, p. 1140.
16. Al-Damiri based his reports on the transmitter al-Suhaili, also known as Qasim b. Thabit.
17. Al-Damiri 1274/1857, vol. 1, p. 406.
18. Although historians from as early as Ibn Ishaq (d. 767) recorded Ali's heroic acts as standard-bearer of the Prophet at Kheybar (known as *hadith al-rayah*, 'the hadith of the banner'), al-Tabari's account appears to be the earliest to include the mention of the origins of Ali's nickname as *Haydar*.
19. For an explanation of Ismaili theological terms and the history of their development, see Daftary 1990, pp. 84–87.
20. Extract from the *Diwan* of Ibn Hani', translated in Hunzai 1997, p. 35. Ibn Hani' was the court poet of al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, the father of al-'Aziz billah, and his poetry was widely read from Cordoba to Baghdad. For his life, see Daftary 1990, p. 173.
21. According to tradition this sword was given to Ali by the Prophet and later popular traditions describe Ali's extraordinary feats of bravery and physical strength using the sword.
22. I am using the translation by Pieter Smoor with minor modifications; see Smoor 1995, verses 29, 37–39, 48–50, pp. 158–159. For the Arabic, see Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz al-Fatimi 1957, pp. 317–319.
23. *Wasi* (lit. 'legatee') in a Shi'i context refers to Ali as the immediate successor of the Prophet, whose responsibility it was to interpret and explain the message spread by Mohammad (i.e. the Qu'ran and the *shari'a*). See Daftary 1990, pp. 34, 84–89, 567.

24. I have included this verse because it is interesting to note that Tamim's poetic motifs of the lion and the mountain goat also appear as images on al-'Aziz's rock crystal flask, suggesting that he may have been inspired by this piece.
25. al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 1, p. 448. Similar accounts are recorded by the Mamluk historians al-Qalqashandi and Ibn Taghri Birdi. See also Sanders 1994, p. 89.
26. The reference in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* occurs during the reign of the imam-caliph al-Zahir li-I'zaz Din Allah (r. 1021–36) in a panegyric by the Zirid poet Ibn Rashiq. See Hamid Allah 1959, para. 80, pp. 70–73. See also the translation by al-Qaddumi 1996, para. 80, pp. 105–108.
27. Sanders 1994, p. 8. This remains the best study on Fatimid ceremonial to date.
28. A *da'i* (lit. 'he who summons') during the Fatimid period was an appointed position as a trained religious propagandist. The *da'i* was responsible for spreading Ismailism and for winning suitable converts. See Daftary 1990, pp. 189, 213–218.
29. For another example, see the poetry of the chief Fatimid *da'i* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi (d. 1078) in Hunzai 1997, p. 44.
30. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Ruth Barnes for bringing this banner to my attention and for her assistance in acquiring the image and its date. The results of the radiocarbon dating for this banner give equal weight (95 per cent) to a tenth- and an eleventh-century date, with a further peak between 1140 and 1160 AD. For the historical accounts, see Sanders 1994, pp. 72–74; Nasir-i Khusraw 1986, p. 55.
31. Shi'ism and various forms of Sufism shared common elements, such as the belief in the *batin* or esoteric interpretations of the Qur'an (also called *ta'wil*). See the discussion in Daftary 1990, pp. 452–456.
32. Rahim 1987, vol. I, p. 206. The use of lion banners in the Persian lands is also attested from the following verse from Rumi's *Mathnavi*: 'We are like the lions on a banner. Our attacks are constantly caused by the wind.' Cited in Tanavoli 1985, p. 28.
33. For a discussion on the iconography of this mirror case, see Diba 1998, cat. no. 84, pp. 257–259.
34. I wish to thank Dr. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw for his translation of these verses. For an alternate reading, see Diba 1998, p. 258.

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Prayer and Prostration: Imāmī Shi'i Discussions of *al-Sujūd ʿalā al-Turba al-Ḥusayniyya*

Robert Gleave

Introduction

WHILE THE MORE POPULAR, TACTILE ELEMENTS of Shi'ism (and Imāmī Twelver Shi'ism in particular) have received significant scholarly attention, the intricacies of Imāmī religio-legal (*fiqh*) regulations related to the paraphernalia of devotion have not yet been the subject of description, let alone analysis. That the apparent enthusiasm of the Imāmī jurists to lay down a set of rules concerning the accoutrements of prayer reflects a more positive attitude toward the physicalities of worship than that found within the Sunni juristic tradition is debatable. The characteristic Shi'i attachment to a person (i.e. the imam, whether present or hidden) as the defining factor for community inclusion could have facilitated a more receptive attitude toward the equipment required for religious practice amongst the various Shi'i intellectual traditions. This is possible, but has not (yet) been subjected to detailed and exacting examination. The comparison with other religious forms (even in the rather hackneyed analogies of Shi'ism–Roman Catholicism, Sunnism–Protestantism) may be instructive; however, there is an unavoidable essentialising tendency in such an approach because analogies between two items can be explored only once one has defined and delimited both items under comparison.

In the following account, I explore the Imāmī juristic disputes and regulations concerning the variety of surfaces upon which normative prayer (*ṣalāt*) might be performed. In particular, the substance upon which prostration (*sujūd*) takes place is described within the classical literature of Imāmī *fiqh* at a level of detail and concern that (probably) outstrips similar discussions in Sunni cognate literature. The *turba* (or in Persian, *mohr*) is

a compressed disk of earth (normally made from the dust of Karbala, the site of Imam Hoseyn's martyrdom) and is used during prostration as a pad upon which the forehead is placed. Its use is a distinctive Shi'i practice and, unsurprisingly, receives extensive comment in literature, providing a link between *fiqh*'s rarefied discourse and the legitimisation of forms of popular religious performance. The development of juristic categories concerning the valid (and invalid) composition of the *turba* may also indicate the emergence and popularity of particular production processes linked to a vibrant economy in religious auxiliary objects, particularly during the Safavid period. This chapter, then, flows in a direction contrary to the assumptions of material culture studies. That is, rather than moving from concrete to abstract (in the sense of analysing artefacts to inform our understanding of belief systems), I examine the formal (and formalised) description of a belief system (found in religious texts) and attempt to draw conclusions relating to artefacts (rather recklessly, it should be said, without any examination of the artefacts themselves).[1] It should not be ignored, however, that texts are also artefacts (oral or physical) and, therefore, the fit between the metaphysical/physical distinction (the devotion to which is a common enlightenment theme) and the text/artefact disjuncture (which is often the hallmark of material culture studies) is imperfect, to say the least.

The categorisation of surfaces for prostration

A complex of regulations emerges from discussions found within works of *fiqh* concerning the surface upon which one can prostrate without invalidating one's prayer. Of course, these regulations relate to prostration only as part of prayer (i.e. *sujūd* in its ritual, technical sense). Prostration for other purposes (one might say 'non-ritual' prostration) does not, or need not, entail an activation of these regulations. Furthermore, when the jurists discuss *sujūd*, they appear solely concerned with the surface upon which one's forehead might be placed, and not any other part of the body (hands, forearms, legs, feet, etc.). Within these parameters, a series of restrictions and prohibitions is described and often presented as being based on the reports from the imams. It should be remembered, however, that there is nothing inevitable in the causal link between revelatory text and legal judgement. For example, there is the apparently unambiguous statement of Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq that 'you should only prostrate on the ground or on what is nourished by the ground, except for cotton and flax'.[2] However, there is an exception to this general ruling – the imam was asked concerning someone who prayed upon a *misḥ* (a type of cotton cloak). The imam answered, 'If he is in a state of precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyya*),

then there is no harm in it'.[3] But then there is another report from Da'ūd al-Sarmī, who asked Imam Abū al-Ḥasan the third (namely, the Seventh Imam, al-Riḍā), 'Is it permitted to prostrate upon cotton and flax when there is no need to dissimulate?' to which the answer was, 'Permitted (*jā'iz*)'.[4] Now, from this evidence it is unclear whether or not (and in what circumstances) a Shi'i believer can pray upon flax or cotton. In one report, the two are specifically mentioned as impermissible surfaces on which to prostrate; in another they are permitted under circumstances of dissimulation, when the believer has to conceal his or her faith owing to a threat to life or property; in the third report, it appears that it is permitted when there is no need to dissimulate. The revelatory material, then, would seem ambivalent (not to say contradictory). However, al-Ṭūsī[5] proposes a solution. When faced with the need to dissimulate (*taqiyya*), the Shi'a can break a normally inviolable law without penalty (the penalty being the need to repeat a ritual performance, or perform a penance or some other compensatory payment). Hence, the first report is not contradicted by the second report, because the second report refers to circumstances of dissimulation. The third report is more problematic, because it specifically states that prayer on cotton and flax is permitted in non-dissimulation circumstances. Ṭūsī's answer is that the third report allows prostration in circumstances other than those that give rise to an obligation to dissimulate:

> It is permitted to prostrate upon these two substances [cotton and flax] when there is no dissimulation (*idhā lam yakun hunāk taqiyya*) providing that there is some other necessitating cause such as [extreme] heat or cold, or such like. [The report] does not say that it is permitted in circumstances which are not *taqiyya* or similar.[6]

By this, Ṭūsī means that the three revelatory texts that appear to conflict are, in fact, reconcilable because the first sets out the general rule; the second allows this rule to be broken in cases of *taqiyya,* but it does not state that *taqiyya* is the only reason why this rule might be broken – there may be other reasons; and the third report does not, then, contradict the second report because the imam is merely saying that there are occasions that are not characterised by the need for *taqiyya* in which the general rule might be broken (namely, the need to pray on cotton or flax because of extreme heat or extreme cold, making prostration on the ground dangerous, and therefore necessitating a substitute action that [unfortunately] contravenes the general rule).

There is, however, yet a fourth report on this matter. Abū al-Ḥasan is asked whether prayer on flax and cotton is permitted even when there is no

need for *taqiyya* and there is no other necessitating factor (*min ghayr taqiyya wa lā ḍarūra*). Abū al-Ḥasan replies that it is permitted (*dhālika jā'iz*).[7] This would seem to contradict even the modified form of the rule in that it permits prostration on cotton and flax even on those occasions where there is no necessity owing to cold or heat (*ḍarūra*), or fear of persecution (*taqiyya*). Ṭūsī once again produces a nuance that saves him from contradiction:

> This does not contradict ... the earlier reports ... because it is possible that [the imam] is permitting [prostration on cotton and flax here] when there was no necessity which might lead to a soul perishing, and the necessity, brought about by heat or cold, here does not reach this level.[8]

Now, the point here appears to be that the term *ḍarūra* in the report refers to a necessity to pray upon cotton or flax brought about by a danger of life-threatening proportions. Such a danger leads to a permission, alongside the circumstances of *taqiyya* (which might be considered a subcategory of this larger *ḍarūra* category), to violate a norm. The dangers of heat and cold are, usually, less than life-threatening; rather, they are inconvenient (or perhaps stronger or harmful). Therefore, when asked whether there are circumstances other than *taqiyya* and *ḍarūra* that might permit prostration on cotton or flax, the imam is, in fact, refusing to restrict those occasions when prayer on cotton or flax is permitted merely to the need to dissimulate to protect life, property and the Shi'i community (i.e. *taqiyya*), or to ward off a life-threatening danger (*ḍarūra*). Rather, the imam is, in this report, making it clear that much lesser dangers (perhaps even as far as mere inconveniences) can render prostration on cotton and flax permitted.

The process of legal reasoning presented by Ṭūsī strikes one as an ingenious (perhaps desperate) attempt to reconcile contradictory reports from the imams, and I explore it here simply to demonstrate that there is no straight line between the form of a revelatory text and the exegetical endpoint (namely, the legal ruling that forms part of Ṭūsī's *fiqh*). Texts, when used as sources of legal rulings, rarely (perhaps never) provide uncomplicated indicators of a legal ruling; hence, the regulations concerning the employment of material in religious ritual are not a matter of merely presenting a text (though this, in itself, is not free of the exegete's input). Rather, the religious imperative of coherence in the text's message – even when disrupted by a hermeneutic device such as *taqiyya* – controls the process of exegesis to a much greater extent than any commitment to 'what the text says'. There will be, in Ṭūsī's approach, an underlying distinction between what the text 'says' and what it is understood to 'mean'. However,

the distinction between these categories is a fiction – a *ḥīla* – designed to solve the textual problem that presents itself on a first reading of the revelatory material available on this question.[9]

As indicated earlier, there is significant discussion within the Shi'i tradition concerning the surface upon which prostration during prayer can take place. Sunni discussions seem to revolve around the purity status of the surface upon which prayer will be performed. The Shi'i juristic tradition, in part because of more extensive revelatory material related to the substance of the surface (rather than its purity status), has developed a distinctive nexus of regulations. Apart from the general rule concerning 'ground and that which grows from the ground' mentioned previously, there are regulations concerning prostration on a number of types of surfaces. These are conveniently listed in Ṭūsī's *fiqh* work, *al-Mabsūṭ*, which is exemplary in both its comprehensive scope and its attention to detail, and thus deserves extended citation and comment:

> It is only permitted to prostrate on ground or that which gains nourishment from the ground, providing it is not eaten or used as clothing, and this depends upon two conditions [being fulfilled]:
> 1. That [the worshipper] has legal usufruct of the object, be it as owner or with the permission [of the owner].
> 2. That [the object upon which one is to prostrate] is clear of impure substances. As for standing on surfaces even when they have upon them impure substances, this is permitted providing the impure thing is dry and therefore has not passed on [its impurity] to the [surface]. If it is damp, then it is not permitted – and avoiding [such surfaces] is better.[10]

Prohibiting prostration upon material made from plants normally used as foodstuff or in the production of clothing is a commonplace ruling in the Shi'i literature and is, of course, based upon a specific injunction of the imams. An explanation for this prohibition is less obvious – indeed, jurists, in matters related to the practice of worship, shied away from devising reasons for such regulations because they were inscrutable divine rules to be obeyed rather than questioned. Having said that, the prohibition is probably linked to an underlying conception of the utilitarian nature of divine creation, such that each substance has a designated purpose. These purposes form categories of permitted use (cotton is for clothing; fruit is for eating) that if transgressed form something akin to the idea of 'matter out of place', which Douglas argues underlies a good proportion of apparently non-rational religious regulations related to dirt and other substances perceived as impure.[11]

The common juristic concern for ensuring that the worshipper has a legal right to use the object in question is given a ritual context, whereby prayer using objects for which the legal permission is missing ceases to be considered an 'acceptable' performance of the religious duty. Such a regulation exists, if you will, to ensure the moral nature of the ritual performance within the general network of societal relationships. More interesting, perhaps, is the rudimentary scientific notion that damp impure substances transmit impurity to materials with which they come into contact, whereas dry impure substances do not (or, rather, they do not in such a way that renders the surface unusable for the purposes of prostration). It is, however, better to avoid surfaces that have come into contact with an impure substance that is considered dry – presumably because there may be uncertainty about whether it is truly dry (or has been dry for the duration of its presence on the surface in question).

The means whereby impurity is transmitted and the nature of the impurity within an object have received some sustained analysis (though an account of Imāmī literature has been, on the whole, absent in these discussions). A full account is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the previous citation from Ṭūsī's *al-Mabsūṭ* does reveal a portion of the purity framework that controlled the operation of jurists. The crucial distinction, not referenced here but underlying Ṭūsī's passage, is between substances that are impure and those that can contract impurity but equally can have their purity status restored through the performance of a ritual process. Pig meat or faeces, for example, belong to the first category;[12] carpets and other surfaces belong to the second. The item that may have come into contact with the surface on which one is about to pray in the previous citation from Ṭūsī belongs to the first category because the second category may have experienced an impurity infraction, but it does not, by virtue of this, cause an infraction in the objects with which it then comes into contact. The interesting thing about the list of items that cannot form surfaces on which prostration can be performed is that they are (mostly) governed by the regulations concerning a substance being eaten or used for clothing, rather than any consideration of inherent impurity (or, to use the technical term, *najāsa*). Ṭūsī continues:

> In accordance with this statement [i.e. the whole passage just cited], it is not permitted to prostrate upon cotton, flax, wool, hair, fur or hide. This is the case whether the animal has been immolated or not; whether it [the hair, fur or hide] has been dyed or not; whether one eats the meat [of the animal] or not. Similarly it is not permitted to prostrate upon anything that is made of these substances. It is not permitted to pray upon any fruit or foodstuff.

> In the same way it is not permitted to pray upon kohl, sorrel, lime, anything mineral – gold or silver, copper, brass, steel and suchlike. With regards to pitch and asphalt, it is not permitted to prostrate upon them, but with a proviso – if one is compelled to because one does not have upon one's person, or have access to, something which might cover [the pitch and asphalt], then one is permitted to pray upon it.[13]

The operative factor in the construction of this list appears to be whether a substance can legitimately be described as 'ground or that which gains nourishment from the ground, providing it is not eaten or used as clothing'. Clearly, cotton and flax come from the ground but are used for clothing. Wool, hair, fur and hide are neither ground nor come from the ground, and this prohibition extends to items made from these substances (the implication, from Ṭūsī's comment here, is that one should not prostrate on woollen carpet – hence, the need for a *turba*, which I discuss in the next section). Sorrel, for example, is a foodstuff, and, therefore, anything made from it ceases to be a legitimate surface for prayer. Lime and mineral substances cease to be considered 'ground' even though they may have come from the ground, and hence fail. There is some dispute about pitch and asphalt because both could be classed as 'ground or that which gains nourishment from the ground' and are not foodstuffs or used in clothing. It is preferable to cover them with something on which it is permitted to prostrate, but if this is not available, then one can pray upon the pitch or asphalt. Here we see the working out of the general category ('ground or that which gains nourishment from the ground, providing it is not eaten or used as clothing') to particular substances. Some of these are problematic because they have properties by which they might be both included and excluded from the category.

> In the same way, if the ground is baked, it is permitted to place over it a covering (*thawb*) whereby one protects oneself from the heat, even if the covering be made of cotton or flax. It is not permitted to prostrate upon a part of oneself, such as one's hand, one's palm, one's forearm or anything else. It is permitted to prostrate upon all grasses not used for eating or clothing. In the same way, if one comes across a place where there is filth, and one is not able to find an alternative spot, then it is permitted to prostrate upon cotton and flax if one does not have access to anything else.[14]

Here a hierarchy clearly begins to emerge in the classification. *In extremis*, it is permitted to prostrate oneself upon substances normally prohibited.

Cotton and flax, though normally forbidden, are considered preferable to dirt and filth, or to burning oneself on an otherwise acceptable but overheated surface.

> It is permitted to pray upon gypsum, baked brick, stone and wood. It is not permitted on glass or ashes. It is permitted to leave a handful of gypsum upon the surface and prostrate upon that. It is not permitted to prostrate upon plaster.[15]

Gypsum, baked brick, stone and wood are all classed as permitted because they continue to fulfil the criteria for inclusion (being ground or from plants, and not being used for food or clothing). Glass, ashes and plaster, however, can no longer be classed as 'ground' because they have experienced a process of change that moves them from one category to another. The crucial point to remember here (and to which I return later) is that the debate is primarily terminological: in determining whether a surface can be used for prostration, the critical point is whether it can still be described as 'ground' (*arḍ*) within the bounds of acceptable linguistic usage. Items that have undergone a refinement or mixing process (glass or plaster) are unable to be legitimately called 'ground'. Similarly, ashes can no longer be considered 'that which gains nourishment from the ground' because they have undergone a process of change (converted from plant material, through combustion). The point at which a production process is sufficient to entail a change of category is not immediately obvious. Baked brick continues to be 'ground', presumably because the production required nothing other than shaping and firing.

> It is permitted to prostrate upon a prostration surface [or carpet–*sajada*] which is made of threads [of an impermissible substance]. If it is made of straps, and one places one's forehead upon their surface, then it is not permitted. This is the same as the ruling concerning matting and whatever else is made of plants from the ground.[16]

The key point here seems to be the amount of contact between one's forehead and the impermissible substance. Threads (*khuyūṭ*) are acceptable when mixed in with something else. Straps (*suyūr*) are (one presumes) wider, and one runs the risk of them constituting the whole, or majority, of the contact area with the forehead.

> It is reprehensible for one who knows how to read to prostrate upon papyrus on which there is script. If there is no writing upon it, or the person cannot read it, or it is dark, then the reprehensible nature [of this action] is removed.[17]

The ruling here, as with all of the regulations outlined so far, is the product not only of the application of legal categories to substances through an assessment of their particular qualities; it also comes about through the direct revelation of the inclusion of an item in a particular category. In this case, Imam Jaʿfar is reported as saying that it is reprehensible to prostrate on papyrus upon which there is script.[18] The dispensations for the illiterate and those praying in darkness are, it seems, Ṭūsī's own legal reasoning.

Ṭūsī's presentation of the issue is not unusual (though it is conveniently clear and lacks the prolixity of some discussions of the issue): the discursive process outlined here can be seen in any of the major works of classical Imāmī *fiqh*. Many of these regulations, of course, were unlikely to be activated on a regular basis. One can think of few occasions, for instance, when the only surface upon which one might prostrate is asphalt. In this sense, the *fiqh* texts reveal a certain idealism, developed from the need to produce a comprehensive and consistent set of regulations. However, they do set the ground rules for the discussion of the distinctive (and almost universally observed) Shi'i use of the *turba* as a prostration disk, and around which there was some technical debate.

The use of the turba in Shi'i prayer rituals

The sacrality of Karbala, and hence its earth, is evidenced by a number of Imāmī reports, amongst which are two attributed to Imam al-Bāqir:

> God created Karbala 24,000 years before he created the Kaʿba – he made it holy and he blessed it.
>
> Performing an obligatory prayer [in Karbala] is equivalent to the pilgrimage, and performing a superogatory prayer there is equivalent to the ʿUmra.[19]

The hyperbole contained within such reports, and the direct challenge to the supremacy of Sunni ritual elements (*ḥajj*, *ʿumra*, the *kaʿba*), indicate a distinctly sectarian, even *ghālī*, *sitz im leben*.

The earth from Karbala is also credited in the *ḥadīth* literature with sacred qualities. It is forbidden, for example, to consume earth in the normal course of events ('he who devotes himself to eating dirt shares in [the responsibility] for his own death'[20]). The dirt from the tomb of Imam Hoseyn, however, is the only exception to this rule:

> He who eats dirt and then dies, then do not pray over him [making him equal to one who has committed suicide] unless he ate of the dirt of the tomb [of Hoseyn – *ṭīn al-qabr*]. In it is a cure for all ills, though the one who eats it out of greed, will not be cured by it.[21]

The extent of the area from which the earth can be taken is also fixed by Imam Ṣādiq: 'Take the earth of the tomb of Imam Hoseyn for a distance of 70 cubits from the tomb.'[22]

One has, in these early reports, the raw data from which a juristic discussion over the distinctive characteristics of the earth from Hoseyn's tomb might develop. Apart from the use of the earth as the basic material for a prostration disk, there are other, often obscure, *fiqh* discussions in which the earth figures. For example, the use of earth from Karbala during the cleansing ritual of *istinjāʾ* (cleansing of the genitalia following urination) is considered an indication of unbelief, presumably because it constitutes a deliberate insult to the sacred earth.[23] Newborn children should be adorned with earth from Karbala.[24] There is debate about the permissibility of consuming the earth of Karbala at the breaking of the Ramadan fast (with some thinking it obligatory).[25] It is considered recommended (*mustaḥabb*) to place a disk of the earth in the bier before burial.[26] The most sustained discussions, however, concern the use of the earth as a prostration disk (and as an adjunct discussion, the material for the manufacture of prayer beads).

The recommendation to prostrate upon the earth of Hoseyn's tomb (suitably defined), and to make the prayer beads from it, is to be found in the earliest *ḥadīth* collections of the Imāmī Shi'a:

> Imam Ṣādiq said: 'Prostration on the earth of the tomb of Hoseyn illuminates even the seventh heaven.'[27]
>
> Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī said that he wrote to [the Twelfth Imam] asking him whether there was benefit in prostrating upon a tablet of earth from the tomb. [The imam] answered that it was permitted and there was benefit in it.[28]
>
> Imam Ṣādiq only ever prostrated on the *turba* of Hoseyn.[29]

Such references could be multiplied, and it is clear this was a distinctive practice of early Shi'i ritual. There was little juristic debate around its validity, and though the validity of prayer was not dependent upon its usage (unlike the regulations concerning prostration surfaces outlined in the previous section), it was considered 'recommended' practice, and Sallār b. ʿAbd al-Azīz (d. 448 AH/1056–7 AD) states:

> Prayer should only be performed on the ground, or on what the ground nourishes.... [W]hat one should prostrate upon is divided into four categories: what it is permitted to prostrate upon; what it is discouraged from prostrating upon; what it is not permitted

> to prostrate upon; and what is recommended to prostrate upon.... The last category – that which it is recommended to prostrate upon – includes tablets of holy earth and wood from the tombs of the imams.[30]

Whilst there was agreement that the use of a prostration disk from Hoseyn's tomb (*turba Ḥusayniyya*, which refers to both the disk and the earth from the tomb more generally) was recommended, this passage by Sallār gave rise to a significant dispute in the early Safavid period concerning the legitimacy or otherwise of *turba Ḥusayniyya* that has been baked (*mashwiyya*).

In his discussion of the general regulations concerning surfaces upon which prostration may occur, Ṭūsī did not appear to consider the process of firing to constitute a change in the categorisation of a material. Hence, baked brick (*ajurr*) is still considered 'ground' (*arḍ* – though there may be a dispute over whether the term *ajurr* necessarily implies a firing process, or merely baking in the sun). The more specific term used in the *fiqh* texts for fired materials taken from the earth is *khazaf* (a term broader in meaning than simply tile or porcelain). Sallār's position, however, is that it is not permitted to prostrate on 'anything which has come into contact with fire – such as *ajurr*, *khazaf* and earth which has been changed (*mustaḥīla*)'. The question that was debated by jurists was whether the process of firing constituted a change in the composition of a substance taken from the ground, such that it no longer could be considered *arḍ*. The debate, then, was about whether the firing process changed the categorisation of earth from *arḍ* to something else, and by doing so rendered it an invalid substance upon which to prostrate.

It seems that the debate over *khazaf* did not affect juristic positions related to the use of the *turba Ḥusayniyya* for some time. In literary terms, there seems little evidence of any connection between the two topics until the early Safavid period, when Ibrāhīm al-Qaṭīfī (d. after 945 AH/1539 CE) supposedly wrote a treatise in which he not only argued that Sallār was correct in his estimation of *khazaf* being excluded from the category *arḍ*, but also that the baking of earth from Hoseyn's tomb in order to make *turba Ḥusayniyya* rendered them illegitimate as prostration disks. It is clear that the legal problem over the baked *turba* has its origins in the combination of two separate ritual injunctions: the recommendation to pray upon *turba Ḥusayniyya*, and the dispute over the permissibility (or otherwise) of prostrating on *turba mashwiyya* (baked earth). What may have caused this sudden emergence of the legal dispute? One can only hazard a guess, but it would seem likely that there had emerged by the Safavid period some sort of production industry of *turba*s in Karbala, and that baking was seen as necessary to stabilise the process. It is possible (though

one is unable to prove it on the basis of current evidence) that there may have been some alternative explanation for the dispute between Qaṭīfī and his rival ʿAlī al-Karakī (d. 940/1533) over this issue (discussed below).[31] Such a presumption, however, would require further investigation. Qaṭīfī's *risāla* is, apparently, lost (it may never have existed). The surviving writings of Qaṭīfī make no mention of the treatise, and neither do any of the bibliographical or biographical sources before the modern period. It does seem clear, though, that Qaṭīfī held the opinion that once baked, a *turba Ḥusayniyya* was no longer considered a permitted surface on which to pray. This is clear partly because Karakī composed an extensive rebuttal of the view that has survived and was recently edited. Karakī's argument is detailed and used the full force of his juristic skill.

Karakī divides his argument into two sections: first, demonstrating that it is permitted to pray on baked earth, and demonstrating the illegitimacy of claiming that it is forbidden; and, second, demonstrating that it is not discouraged to pray on baked earth, and that those that argue that it is hold a weak opinion. The section devoted to the first occupies much more space in Karakī's *risāla* than the discussions involved in the second; therefore, I shall deal with only the first set of arguments. The important thing to notice here is that Karakī is not, at least in these initial statements, willing to discuss whether the *turba Ḥusayniyya* – that is, a baked disk of earth from Karbala – has any special legal status. The discussion purely concerns the permissibility, discouragement or prohibition on prostrating on baked earth (wherever it may have originated). This could be evidence of an attempt on Karakī's part to extract from the discussion any 'folk' or 'popular' Islamic notions of the particular ritual sacrality of the earth of Karbala.

At the outset of the first section, in which Karakī seeks to demonstrate that it is permitted to pray on baked earth, there is an excursus into legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*):

> There is no doubt that legal indicators – such as the general (*ʿāmm*), and the unrestricted (*muṭlaq*) and continuation (*istiṣḥāb*)[32] ... have probative force and that it is obligatory to adopt them [as legal proofs]. There is no difference between these [deductive rulings] and textual legal rulings in terms of them being proofs. This is the case even though the textual proof takes precedence when there is a contradiction.[33]

The point he is making here is that although there may be no explicit textual indicator that praying on baked earth is permitted, there are many

textual indicators that praying on earth generally is permitted, and these continue to be in force (*istiṣḥāb*) despite the fact that the earth has been baked. The term for earth (*arḍ*), then, is general (*ʿāmm*) and unrestricted (*muṭlaq*) in its application to all items that can be described, linguistically, as 'earth'. This is Karakī's principal argument against Qaṭīfī, who (it appears) argued that the firing process removed an item from the category of earth:

> Texts indicate that it is permitted to prostrate on a *turba Ḥusayniyya* before it was baked. It is obligatory that this ruling continues after the baking process. ...[34]

The aforementioned hermeneutic techniques (*istiṣḥāb*, *iṭlāq*, *ʿumūm*) are employed in a number of related, but discrete, arguments in Karakī's *risāla*. The end result is a set of arguments that build upon each other to 'prove' his overall position. A selection of these arguments will suffice in giving the flavour of the juristic reasoning here.

In terms of the principle of continuance (*istiṣḥāb*), Karakī explains that there are two sorts of *istiṣḥāb*. The first is when a ruling that has been explicitly stated in a revelatory text is presumed to continue in force as there is no strong indication that it has been particularised (*takhṣīṣ*) or restricted (*taqyīd*). The evidence here would be another text, or some rational or linguistic indicator. On this he writes:

> The texts indicate that it is permitted to pray on the *turba*... before it was baked. It is necessary, then, that this ruling continue to be in force (*istiṣḥāb*) after baking due to the absence of an [opposing] report, legally speaking. ...[35]

The other type of *istiṣḥāb* refers to the continuance of a text that, though not explicit in a revelatory text, has been the subject of a consensus of the community (*ijmāʾ*):

> There was a consensus that one could pray upon the *turba* before it was baked, and this ruling continues despite the presence of a [later] dispute. This is the case, even though the [earth] may have been baked, since there is no transmission, legally speaking, be it a text or a subsequent consensus [which might invalidate the original consensus].[36]

In addition, when one hears the phrase '*turba*', one immediately thinks of all *turba*s – both baked and unbaked. What immediately appears in one's mind is an indication of the original meaning of a word. Furthermore, if a

turba ceases to be pure after being baked, and, therefore, an illegitimate surface on which to prostrate, then anyone who swears an oath on the baked *turba* is not bound by his vow. Because the *turba Ḥusayniyya* is no longer pure, let alone sanctified, the vows are invalid; the same is true of those who make a vow and sanctify it by eating a piece of *turba Ḥusayniyya*.

Another notable emphasis within Karakī's discussion relates to the question over whether it is permitted to pray on fired earth (*khazaf*) and baked bricks (*ajurr*). This, one recalls, is the category of items that Sallār had prohibited from being used for prostration – a prohibition that had led to the general prohibition by Qaṭīfī (or someone contemporary with him) of the *turba mashwiyya* (the baked *turba*). Their argument is particularly weak, in Karakī's view. They believe that the fact that the earth after it has undergone firing has a new name is an indication that it has changed categories. Here Karakī introduces rudimentary geology into the argument:

> The simple change of a name does not necessitate a distinction between the various forms. This is so even though at times it does necessitate a distinction, such as when one burns [organic] matter, it become ashes, and the general understanding from [the terms] earth and ashes is that they are totally distinct entities. However, for some forms, [the appearance of a new name] does not necessitate [a distinction in terms of entity]. For example, stone was originally dust which has been hardened through the agency of the sun, and it is then given a new name, 'stone'. However, it does not cease to be considered 'ground' by general agreement. It is merely one category amongst the various categories of [ground].[37]

Karakī argues that Sallār (and those who follow him) have misunderstood the nature of the change that occurs to earth when it is fired. They thought the burning process in itself caused a change of category, but this is not the case. Sometimes it does lead to a category distinction (wood-ashes); at other times it does not (dust-stone). The baking process for a *turba* is of the second category, not the first, and, therefore, the *turba* is still to be classified as earth (*arḍ*), even though it may have acquired a new name through experiencing the process. Hence, *khazaf* and *ajurr* are both acceptable surfaces upon which to pray, even though these are new names for what was, previously, simply *arḍ*.

Karakī's ingenious and detailed discussion of how baked earth from Hoseyn's tomb is a permitted substance upon which to pray is extended.

The most powerful arguments, though, relate to baked earth generally. There is also an extensive discussion of how the process of firing can act as a purifying mechanism, thereby preventing baked earth from being considered impure,[38] and a proof that although baked earth may not qualify as *ṣaʿīd* (the substance stipulated for dry lustration, *tayammum*) this does not prevent it from being classified as *arḍ* (earth more generally). The issues relating to *turba Ḥusayniyya* are merely an important subsection of these general discussions. However, Karakī does present a number of reports that relate directly to the 'dirt from Hoseyn's tomb' (*ṭīn qabr al-Ḥusayn*) and its healing properties, its use in the production of rosaries and its inclusion (as a blessing) within the bier:

> The term *turba* and the term *ṭīn* in the various ways in which the imams spoke of them were always used to refer to *turba* which has been baked.[39]

Hence, Karakī argues, although there is not an explicit mention of baked dirt in the *akhbār* and the permitted nature of its use as a prostration surface, there is a very strong implication (by the use of the term *ṭīn*) that the imams permitted, even recommended, praying upon the baked earth from Karbala. Furthermore, the indications that the contrary was the case (i.e. that baked earth from Karbala was not to be used) are much weaker. Therefore, on the basis of *tarjīḥ* (i.e. 'expressing a preference' for the stronger set of indications), not only is the use of baked earth permitted, but (in the case of dirt from Karbala) it is recommended.

Karakī's success in establishing the permissibility of prostration upon baked earth in general, and the baked earth of Hoseyn's tomb in particular, was such that subsequent discussions were broadly in agreement with his conclusions. For example, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623) was asked about *al-turba al-mashwiyya* in a set of questions from his pupil Ḥusayn Ẓahīr al-Dīn. Now, Astarābādī is regularly heralded as the founder of the Akhbārī movement, which supposedly reduced the acceptability of non-textual legal reasoning. He would be unconvinced by Karakī's statement that non-textual, deductive indicators are as forceful as textual ones, and that this principle enables one to argue effectively that prayer upon baked earth, from Karbala or elsewhere, was permitted. Furthermore, al-Qaṭīfī, Karakī's supposed opponent, was (according to some secondary commentators) an Akhbārī (or at least a precursor to the Akhbarism of Astarābādī). These factors might lead one to think that Astarābādī's position should be that baked earth is not a permitted substance for prostration, if not because of

textual evidence, then at least because of caution (*iḥtiyāṭ*).[40] However, this is not the case:

> [Ẓahīrī] says – may God the most high strengthen him:
>
> What do you say concerning mud, taken from Imam Hoseyn's tomb, and baked ... (does the baking in the normal manner mean that the mud is excluded from the category of earth or not?)
>
> [I say:]
>
> The truth is that there is no need to deviate from the rulings concerning earth generally on this matter. Hence, it is permitted to prostrate upon it, and to do *tayammum* with it.[41]

Karakī's and Astarābādī's positions, then, were identical, notwithstanding their very serious differences in terms of legal methodology. The broad unanimity between Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs on this question continued throughout the Safavid period. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sabzawārī (d. 1090 AH/1679 CE) argues along the same lines as Karakī (as one might expect from an Uṣūlī).[42] Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186 AH/1772 CE), for example, examines the *ḥadīth* from Imam Ṣādiq:

> Prostration upon the earth is an obligation (*farīḍa*) and upon things that are not earth is *sunna*.[43]

This does not mean that prostration upon anything other than earth is permitted in an unrestricted manner, Baḥrānī argues. The imam is referring here to prostration upon earth from Hoseyn's tomb, and prostration upon other things from his tomb (panels, tablets, prayer mats, etc.) is also permitted. Baḥrānī, however, goes on to speak of the merits of praying upon the earth from Karbala, through citing the usual reports ('it illuminates the seventh heaven', 'it removes the veil of the seventh heaven', etc.). That is, for Baḥrānī, prayer upon earth is generally obligatory, the only exception being prayer on other substances taken from the tomb of Hoseyn (such as wood from the bier or other substances). Within the obligation to pray upon earth, there are different additional blessings that may come from different categories of earth. In this hierarchy of blessings, the earth from the tomb of the imams occupies the highest level,[44] and the worshipper gains additional reward (*thawāb*) – and in all of this there is no difference between baked and unbaked earth.

By Baḥrānī's time, there was little debate over the permissibility of praying upon baked earth from the tomb of Hoseyn. That problem had been solved. It appears that Karakī's extended *risāla* on the subject became the standard text, and the arguments within it were trotted out without critical

examination by subsequent authors.[45] That is not to say that there was not continued discussion over the use of the *turba* in Shi'i literature. One finds various references to the *turba* in subsequent juristic texts. In more modern texts, the emphasis has been upon demonstrating that the Shi'a are not worshipping the *turba* itself (probably in the face of Wahhābī attacks on the Shi'a into which the accusation of idolatry in relation to the *turba* had been incorporated).[46]

Concluding remarks

From this complex of arguments, counterarguments and the detail of legal categorisation, a general, perhaps even methodological, question emerges: Does Shi'i ritual – be it elite, popular or folk – display a greater level of physicality than counterpart Muslim traditions? Notwithstanding the potentially essentialising tendency within the question (which, it could be argued, is a *raison d'être* of the current collection), there are additional problematic aspects in a question posed in this manner. It would, of course, be tempting to answer in the affirmative, and one can imagine constructing a fanciful theory of the reasons for this. Such a theory might be based around the immanence or presence inherent within Shi'i doctrines of the Imamate, the Occultation and the Parousia. However, whilst these doctrinal factors may, individually, encourage the popularity of ritual paraphernalia, any assumption that their absence within Sunni traditions might have the opposite effect would be inaccurate. Such a deduction would be based on a characterisation of Sunni religious practice in which a generalised depiction is drawn from the austere religious practice of modern reformist (and, explicitly, anti-Sufi) movements. Of course, Sunni religious practice (which can only rarely be distinguished from Shi'i practice, or indeed 'Muslim' practice more generally) demonstrates the same richness and diversity as its companion traditions (including, it should be added, a comparable level of physicality and concern for the tactile aspects of ritual).[47] Rather – and here is where the investigation should, in my view, begin – religious artefacts such as the *turba* provide crucially important cases, through which an analysis of Shi'i religious life informed from various methodological perspectives might be advanced. The interplay of text (the supposed prerogative of the elite, and the subject of the intellectual historian) and artefact (the prosaic and humdrum, but lifted to recognition by the anthropologist) has not yet formed the central focus of Shi'i ritual studies. Positing any alleged peculiar Shi'i tendency toward physicality can only, I submit, be answered through a refocusing that makes this interplay a central concern.

Notes

1. The textual discussions (and juristic finesse) outlined in this chapter may, in fact, have extremely limited relevance to material culture – regarding Islam generally or Shi'i Islam specifically. However, this relationship has not yet been fully explored in the extant literature on textual and anthropological aspects of religious ritual. McDannell's description of the American Christian penchant for material artefacts could equally apply to the Shi'a (or indeed, most forms of Islam generally): 'American Christians want to see, hear and touch God.... Throughout American history, American Christians have explored the meaning of the divine, the nature of death, the power of healing, and the experiences of the body by interacting with a created world of images and shapes.' McDannell 1995, p. 1.
2. al-Kulaynī 1363, vol. 1, p. 91.
3. Ibn Bābūya n.d., vol. 1, pp. 270–271, no. 835.
4. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1363b, vol. 1, p. 224.
5. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH/1067 CE), who cites these reports, proposes a solution.
6. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1363a, vol. 1, p. 332.
7. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1363b, vol. 1, p. 223.
8. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1363a, vol. 1, p. 333.
9. The ambiguity of the texts enables, and often justified, the difference of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) amongst the jurists. On this question, the *ikhtilāf* is catalogued by al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf (d. 726/1325) (al-ʿAllāma 1413, vol. 1, pp. 89–90).
10. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, vol. 1, p. 89.
11. Douglas 1966.
12. This category may, in turn, be subdivided as Reinhart does between 'things coming from within bodies' (i.e. matter out of place, such as faeces) and historical, ethnic-origin taboo subjects (such as pig meat). Reinhart 1990, pp. 7–9. In both cases, the substance in question is thought to be 'inherently' impure, and they 'defile contagiously' – hence the concern over their presence on a surface about to be used for prostration.
13. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, p. 89.
14. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, p. 89–90.
15. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, p. 90.
16. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, p. 90.
17. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1387, p. 90.
18. al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī 1363a, vol. 1, p. 334.
19. al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī n.d., p. 411.
20. al-Kulaynī 1363, vol. 6, p. 265, no. 3.
21. Ibn Bābūya n.d., vol. 2, pp. 599–600, no. 3204.
22. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad 1417, p. 469. This *ḥadīth* is taken from an extensive chapter on the special qualities of Karbala and Hoseyn's tomb, pp. 468–486. See

also Ibn Bābūya n.d., vol. 2, p. 600, no. 3206 (where the extent of the *ḥaram* is fixed at five parasangs). This, and the last *ḥadīth*, come from al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's section in the *Faqīh* entitled *faḍl turbat al-Ḥusayn wa-ḥarīm qubrihi*. al-Nīsābūrī's section *Faṣl fī faḍl Karbalā wa-faḍl al-turba* is found in al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī n.d., pp. 411–412. The presence of such passages in the very earliest Shi'i literature indicates the centrality of these practices to Shi'i ritual through history.

23. al-Baḥrānī 1379, vol. 2, pp. 43, 46.
24. Ibid., vol. 7, p. 131.
25. Shahīd I, 1419, vol. 4, pp. 175–176. It should, according to most, be taken as a cure and does not constitute a special means of breaking the fast.
26. Shahīd II n.d., p. 317.
27. Ibn Bābūya n.d., vol. 1, p. 378, no. 829.
28. al-Tabarsī 1386, vol. 2, p. 312.
29. al-Daylamī n.d., p. 115.
30. Sallār 1414, p. 66.
31. For example, Qaṭīfī, based in southern Iraq, could have been maintaining a constant level of demand for the local industry of *turba* production by demanding that each *turba Ḥusayniyya* have built-in obsolescence (as a baked *turba* will, theoretically, have a longer shelf life than one that is merely compressed).
32. For the details on these legal principles, see Gleave 2000, pp. 174–178.
33. *al-Risāla fī al-sujūd ʿalā al-turba al-mashwiyya*, found in al-Karakī 1409, pp. 89–118. This reference is found on pp. 92–93.
34. al-Karakī 1409, p. 94.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. al-Karakī 1409, p. 97.
38. Ibid., pp. 101–103.
39. Ibid., p. 100.
40. For the Akhbārī discussions of *ihtiyāṭ*, see Gleave 2000, pp. 105–112 and Gleave 2007b, pp. 286–294.
41. Gleave 2007a, p. 87 (English translation, p. 104).
42. al-Sabzawārī n.d., vol. 1, p. 204.
43. Ibn Bābūya n.d., vol. 1, p. 207, no. 621.
44. Interestingly, Baḥrānī is not exclusive, believing that the textual indicators are sufficiently general to indicate that any dirt from any of the imams' tombs entails this special blessing. al-Baḥrānī 1379, vol. 7, p. 261.
45. Subsequent discussions can be found in Jawād al-ʿĀmilī 1419, vol. 6, pp. 330–344 and vol. 7, p. 341; al-Najafī 1365, vol. 8, p. 414.
46. See Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ n.d., vol. 1, p. 242; al-Subḥānī n.d., pp. 171–174. There are also *risālas* on the topic that I have not managed to locate, but that will form the sources for further study, amongst which are Ṣāḥib al-Riyāḍ ʿAlī

al-Ṭabaṭabāʾī's *al-Risāla fī al-sujūd ʿalā al-turba al-ḥusayniyya* and Mahdī al-Sabzawārī's *Khayr al-Tuḥuf* (referenced in Aghā Buzurg 1403, vol. 7, p. 281); *Sajdeh-gah* (see Aghā Buzurg 1403, vol. 12, p. 147); ʿAlī b. Abī al-Qāsim al-Raḍawī, *Lumaʿ-yi maʿāna* (see Aghā Buzurg 1403, vol. 18, p. 354); Bāqir Sharīf al-Qurashī, *al-Sujūd ʿala al-turba al-ḥusayniyya* (referenced in Hayʾat al-turāth 1416, p. 453); ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Amīnī, *al-Sujūd 'alā al-turba al-ḥusayniyya 'inda al-shīʿa al-imāmīyya* (Hayʾat al-turāth 1420, pp. 239–240).

47. David Morgan's work, for example, illustrates nicely how the outward Protestant embracing of 'plainness' gave way to an employment of a variety of media – including artefacts – through which evangelical Christianity might be furthered (Morgan 1999).

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Talismans from the Iranian World: A Millenary Tradition

Ziva Vesel

Introduction

IRANIAN POPULAR TALISMANS MADE WITHIN THE last hundred years are remarkable for both the aesthetic beauty of their drawings and their learned inscriptions. Nevertheless, it is not easy to determine the extent of their true Shiʿi character; the fact that they are fabricated in Iran does not automatically bestow on them a Shiʿi identity. The existence of a large number of specialised treatises in the field of occult sciences produced in the Islamic world over a span of more than a thousand years helps us to study the problem. Additionally, the particular interest of the Iranian world in the patronage of the illustrated book undoubtedly accounts for the development of figurative representation in general, including on talismans.

Written sources with inscriptions and diagrams

In the field of divination and magic, Islamic literature assimilated previous heritages – namely Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Greek and Indian – and Islamicised them to a greater or lesser degree. In the Iranian world, Sunni and Shiʿi traditions that flourished simultaneously, at least since the time of Imam Jaʿfar al-Sādiq and the alchemist Jābir ibn Hayyān, added to the pre-Islamic heritage an extensive repertory of their own religious protective formulas. The manufacture of objects with inscriptions to be worn permanently on the body seems to have been a very old tradition that paid great attention to the choice of metal, gem and colour, in accordance with the cosmic analogies described in occult literature,[1] but that generally avoided figurative representation. The repertory of these inscriptions, and a kind of 'graphical elaboration' that often accompanies them – such as geometrical figures, diagrams, magic squares (*aʿdād al-wafq*), the

use of *abjad* and *jafr*, and magical scripts – should be studied on their own in order to systematise the approach in the field.[2] The very learned foundations of occult sciences that combine numerous traditions, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, make the decipherment of talismans nevertheless extremely difficult with the exception of religious inscriptions. However, this type of talismanics was more extensively studied than other categories. Consequently, in this chapter I examine exclusively the description of figurative representation on talismans, especially of human figures, in regard to written sources of the Iranian world. Considering the latter, Arabic literature is more regularly studied in the field (e.g. see Savage-Smith 1997 and 2004) than the Persian literature, namely the old Persian translations of Arabic texts or more recent Persian compositions.[3] With a few exceptions, I do not treat here the following basic problematics relevant to the study of talismanics: the classification of magical arts and their numerous subdivisions, a system that often varies according to authors; the question of licit or illicit magic; the functions of talismans and practices linked to them; the comparison of Sunni and Shi‘i traditions as a whole; the comparison of inscriptions in Persian and Arabic; and Iranian magic from the pre-Islamic period.

The figurative illustrations on talismans can be divided into two distinctive trends: those described (and sometimes depicted) in written sources, and those represented on objects.

Written sources with figurative illustration

Among several written traditions of magic known in the Islamic world (Salomonian, Hermetic, etc.), the pagan philosophy of the Sabeans of Harran, who worshipped planets, is directly linked to figurative representations on talismans. The description of their beliefs and practices, including from a theoretical point of view, is to be found in various genres of Islamic literature: encyclopaedic works of a historical character (Ibn al-Nadīm,[4] Mas‘ūdī, Bīrūnī), treatises on religions and sects (Shahrestānī), astrological compendia (Abu Ma‘shar), chapters on astrology and magic in larger encyclopaedias (Ikhwān al-Safā’[5]), magical treatises such as *Ghāyat al-hakīm* by pseudo-Majrītī,[6] and so forth. The Iranian world – in a broad sense – produced a chain of texts, in Arabic and Persian, by both Sunni and Shi‘i authors, that can be considered relevant for the understanding of Sabean science and its further development into talismanics. In addition to the authors I have already listed, it is important to mention, in regard to Arabic texts in the field, Abū Ya‘qūb Serāj al-dīn Sakkākī (d. *c.* 626 AH/1229 AD) for his treatise on conjuring planets[7] and, in particular, Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī

(d. 606 AH/1210 AD), who wrote, after 1179, a basic compilation on the Sabeans entitled *al-Sirr al-maktūm al-mukhātabāt al-nujūm*[8] (The Hidden Secret of the Invocation of Stars). The latter was translated into Persian in 1236,[9] a translation that was also illustrated in a copy made for the Mughal Akbar toward the end of the sixteenth century.[10] Some other Persian sources are important in their turn in this field, such as the apocrypha of Avicenna, *Konūz al-mo'azzemīn*,[11] and the outstanding *Ketāb-e Mafātih al-maghāliq* by Mahmūd Dehdār 'Fānī' Shirāzī (d. 1607–8).[12] The *Daqā'eq al-haqā'eq* by Nasīrī,[13] extant in a Persian copy dated 1272, should also be connected to this textual and pictorial trend, even if its contents are particularly unusual and original.

The aforementioned literature contains an extensive description of the Harranean ritual, including the prayers to planets in Arabic, often reproducing its different variants *in extenso*. On the other hand, the isolated description of the simple procedure of the manufacture of talismans, taken out of this theoretical context, is present in various sources of the popularisation of science in Persian literature, such as in cosmographies and encyclopaedias. Several pictorial elements used in the Islamic world in this category of magic draw their basis from astrology/astronomy, which is namely the case with planets, degrees of the ecliptic and lunar mansions – motifs pertaining to archaic traditions of the representation of the sky.

The description of Sabean magic is partially at the origin of the representation of five planets – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – and the two luminaries, the moon and the sun (*sūrat-e setāregān* or *sovar al-kavākeb al-sab'e*), necessary for the manufacture of talismans in tune with a particular conjunction. Either described verbally in Arabic and Persian texts or depicted in paintings, they appear as personified:[14] the luminaries are represented as sitting figures holding corresponding halos, Mercury as a scribe, Venus as a musician, etc.

Another type of image that was used in talismanic magic is the description of the 360 degrees of the ecliptic (*sovar-e daraj/darejāt*; 30 degrees by the sign of the zodiac). This is usually described only verbally in Arabic and Persian texts, namely in *al-Sirr* of F. Rāzī,[15] and sometimes put into paintings. For the latter, there exist three illustrated manuscripts in this field, exclusively in Persian: two in the tradition of Indian degrees (attributed to Tomtom Hendī),[16] and one representing degrees attributed to Teucros (i.e. Tankalūshā/Tangelūshā),[17] ultimately pertaining to Nabatean literature, but possibly also to pre-Islamic Iran.[18] Teucros is also credited in the Islamic world with a book on talismans, based on various 'figures of the sky'.

In spite of the fact that the representation of planets and degrees is explicitly said in texts to be directly linked to the manufacture of talismans, these pictorial elements apparently stayed within a written-book tradition of magic, probably described as an archaic curiosity, as they do not figure on talismans (i.e. objects) extant from the ancient period. It cannot automatically be presumed that all these images were systematically linked to perishable talismans, such as those on paper, because the texts often recommend engraving the image on metal, at least as far as planets are concerned. On the contrary, there exist sui generis figurative talismans from *c.* ninth- to thirteenth-century Iran, with engravings of long-horned stags or oryxes, scorpions, lions, three or five stars, birds etc.[19]; however, they are extremely rare and permit only tentative comparison with talismans of pre-Islamic Iran,[20] and with written sources or objects of the recent period, from the mid-nineteenth and twentieth century (see 'Objects with Figurative Illustrations' infra).

It must be underlined that Iranian written sources of the Islamic period contributed in particular to the description of the iconography of planets and degrees used in astral magic, whether verbally or put into painting. Simultaneously, the depiction of planets was widely present also in a purely astrological context, and as such reproduced in old manuscripts as well as on various objects. It is primarily in this context that mention must be made of the astrological figure of 'the lion and the sun' (i.e. the sun in his domicile Leo)[21] and, probably, the personification of the sun as a woman's face (*khorshīd-khānum*), motifs much present on modern and recent Iranian talismans and objects (Figure 88 and Plate 14).

The iconography of the 28 lunar mansions (*manāzil al-qamar*)[22] used in talismanic treatises, as, for example, in the Persian *Kanz al-ʿasheqīn*,[23] is a subject little studied to this day. Apparently mansions are also described in the magical operations of *Haqāʾeq al-daqāʾeq*.[24] Their representation in paintings is extremely rare, be it in magic, astrology or astronomy.[25]

The description of the signs of the zodiac (*manāzil al-burūj*) figures in treatises on Sabeism, mainly for correspondence with the levels found in the world, such as in metals, gems, animals and colours,[26] astrological calculations and so on, and usually not for their iconography. The latter is nevertheless particularly frequent in a purely astrological context of the same period. As far as objects are concerned, signs of the zodiac (and the seven planets) can sometimes figure on Safavid magico-medicinal bowls.[27]

Contrary to the Western Islamic heritage (see *Ghāyat al-hakīm*[28]), other archaic Old Iranian, Mesopotamian and Indian pictorial elements of astrological origin, such as the 'genuine' decans (*vajh, vujūh*) described by



Figure 88 Silver necklace with the face of the sun in the form of a woman (*khorshīd-khānum*), 3 magical squares and a pair of eagles turning their backs. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

Abū Ma'shar Balkhī[29], seem to have been absent from talismanic writings – as well as from its practice or presence on objects – in the Iranian world.[30] Moreover, genuine decans (to be distinguished from 'decan-lords', that is, the planets that govern them[31]) were obviously not put into paintings in the extent of the entire Islamic world, contrary to their heritage in Latin Europe. As for the remaining archaic pictorial motifs in astrology, such as the lunar nodes, the imaginary planet Dragon (Jawzahr) and planets in exaltation (*sharaf*), their occurrence in the talismanic magic of written Iranian sources still requires study in comparison with their presence on objects and in material culture in general.[32]

A distinct iconographic tradition of talismans is present in the well-known treatise *Telesm-e Eskandariyye or Dhakhīre-ye Eskandariyye/ Eskandarānī*[33] of Hermetic origin, where the authority most frequently quoted is Bālinās (Apollonius of Tyana). Figures, which in the case of planets are partly common with those of astral magic, and in the case of constellations partly different, appear roughly identical in Persian manuscripts[34] as well

as in lithographs of the Persian translation of the text.[35] Interestingly, the rare illustrations in the lithograph of Vā'ez Kāshefī's (d. 1504–5) *Asrār-e Qāsemī*[36] are close to the Hermetic trend.

Images pertaining to the more recent iconographic tradition in written sources are simply and crudely drawn human figures that are mainly linked to other occult 'operations' (*'amaliyyāt*: e.g. exorcism and the curing of madness or other illnesses)[37] and, as such, concern figurative representation in the occult arts in general. If we consider that the magic implies acting on a certain spirit (be it planetary, *jenn*, demonic, etc.), these figures pertain to the field; nevertheless, they do not concern our subject because we are limiting ourselves here to representations originating in astral magic found in written sources, which are the basis of figurative talismanics.[38] Various compilations of occult sciences, such as *Konūz-e Hoseynī*[39] or *Kashkūl* by Najafī,[40] contain these figures.

On the whole, the majority of ancient talismanic texts depict astral figures because of the belief that astral bodies, namely planets, are alive and that they govern us, and thus priority was given to depicting them when they are in their favourable astral positions; in this sense astral magic is the basis of figurative talismanics. Ancient texts, such as pseudo-Majrītī's *Ghāyat al-hakīm* and Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī's *al-Sirr al-maktūm,* describe, on the other hand – still in a strong connection with astrology – an infinite repertory of traditional talismanic figures invented in accordance with the aim researched: the figures of a couple, or of a woman or man, to obtain love and power over the opposite sex; of two men wrestling to obtain discord; of animals (such as scorpions or lions) for protection from them; and so on. It is this pictorial trend, which, in general, is without astrological elements, that is most present on modern figurative talismanic objects.

Objects with figurative illustrations

The iconography that appears on talismans since roughly two centuries ago has, partially, as already stated, its counterpart in ancient written literature. In this respect, it is interesting to compare Iranian pre-Islamic[41] as well as old Islamic extant figurative talismans[42] tentatively with modern ones, through some rare, stable common figures, such as the scorpion, over a time span of more than a thousand years. Concerning modern talismanic iconography, since the nineteenth century it has also displayed an independent pictorial repertory that becomes progressively inspired by its own contemporary models. Talismans are represented on various supports of different forms, of which I give some examples without describing other aspects of these materials that would require detailed

study, such as inscriptions, metal alloys used in manufacture and various techniques of material reproduction:

1. Forms cut in metal (usually brass, tin or copper and rarely silver): bird (Figure 89), fish, lion, tiger; a (male) human figure with a crown; a human figure with two horns (which recalls either a 'demon' – *div*[43] – or a 'king of demons'[44]); a simple human figure; 'the door of love' (*bāb al-hobb*),[45] which is the 'horse-shoe' (*na'l*); etc.
2. Aesthetically elaborated representations on square, rectangular, circular or semicircular metallic plaques:
   a) A man or woman's face, surrounded by '*bāb al-hobb*' (Plate 15 and Figure 90); couples (Figure 91, Yūsef and Zūleykhā; and Figure 92); isolated portraits of women covered with inscriptions, sometimes combined with the figures of the heart and the fish; riding a lion (Figure 93) or a donkey (Figure 94), or just seated, with long hair and wings somehow in the style of a *pari*[46] (Figure 95). This series is explicitly dedicated to obtaining love, luck and power over the opposite sex. Very frequent iconographical association of the heart, the fish and the couple can be seen, with several magic squares, on a skull of a horse that was found buried in the ground near a Qajar castle:[47] this unusual item seems to be one of the earliest occurrences of an extant object displaying precisely this talismanic repertory (Figure 96).
   b) Particularly striking is the talisman with a human skeleton, a *div* ('associated' with a human face), a serpent and a scorpion (Plate 16).[48] The skeleton alone sometimes can be put in the middle of a couple. In the same category can figure a talisman that is entirely covered by a drawing of a scorpion.[49] These talismans apparently have the function of protecting against harm or illness – or eventually causing harm themselves (i.e. *siyāh nebesht*, 'black-written') – a subject that still needs to be studied.

In this way, numerous categories of talismans can be established according to the function they fulfil, which in its turn determines their basic iconography. Some themes became real classics, as can be seen with ancient as well as with modern talismans, such as a magical square surrounded by the depiction of the 12 signs of the zodiac.

The silver pendants combining the iconography of the face of the sun (*khorshīd-khānum*) with a pair of eagles who are turning their backs and a protective inscription, such as *vāni yaqād* (Qur'an, sura 68; 51–52) (Plate 14), or a magic square (Figure 88), are particularly attractive and probably quite ancient. The association of the sun and the eagles might be reminiscent of



Figure 89 Talisman representing a peacock (cut in brass).
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Figure 90 Semicircular talisman for obtaining a woman's love and power over her representing a woman's face with a small man's face under it both placed on a horseshoe (*na*'*l*) or '*bāb al-hobb*' covered with inscriptions (copper alloy).
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Figure 91 Rectangular talisman for obtaining love and affection representing the couple Yūsef and Zūleykhā covered and surrounded by inscriptions (copper alloy). © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

the representation of Mithra from the Parthian period.[50] Apparently, this type of talisman can obviously be elaborated in very different stylistic and symbolic ways (Figure 97) and it is difficult to tell which of the two models preceded the other.

The *bāzū-band* that is fixed to one or both arms, apparently a practice of ancient origin,[51] can also be cut in metal – often in silver – bearing inscriptions and sometimes figures.[52] Nevertheless, arm amulets are usually covered exclusively with religious inscriptions engraved on metal or semiprecious stones.

Shi'i traditions of texts and objects in the field of magic

Iranian popular talismans that do not have an obvious Shi'i character are founded on the common learned basis of occult sciences and also benefit from a long Iranian tradition of the illustrated book. Nevertheless, some



Figure 92 Rectangular talisman for obtaining love and affection representing a couple covered and surrounded by inscriptions (copper alloy).
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of these materials display truly Shi'i aspects and cannot in this case be considered talismans but, rather, strongly religious-commemorative objects with protective and talismanic power.

As far as texts are concerned, a trilogy by Sheikh Najafī (who compiled his *Favā'ed* in 1961 in Najaf, and then his *Konūz* and *Kashkūl*, probably in Qom, in 1981) that he published in the form of a facsimile autograph manuscript at his own publishing house in Qom – as well as some other texts by various authors that he transcribed – represent what a Shi'i author from the twentieth century would retain from past materials in the field of occult sciences: obviously Sunni materials, with, of course, citations from the Qur'an, as well as some clearly Shi'i texts. By all means, Najafī's work is a treasury combining all traditions and as such deserves detailed study,[53] as well as chapters on occult sciences in Rostamdārī's *Riyāz al-abrār* (written in 1571), the work of another Shi'i author.[54]

From the material point of view of objects, we can say that recent Iranian popular talismans are, as in the old tradition, engraved on metal



Figure 93 Rectangular talisman for obtaining love and control representing a woman with a crown riding a lion covered and surrounded by inscriptions (copper alloy). © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

or semiprecious stones, or written on paper or cloth (and more rarely on gazelle skin). Their Shi'i aspect is visible in inscriptions referring to the Twelve Imams, especially to Ali and to the 'Five Pure' (*panj tan*) – Mohammad, Ali, Fatemeh, Hasan and Hoseyn – or in Shi'i prayers such as *nād-e 'Aliyyān*. From the pictorial point of view, the same is true of figures: they are easily identified as Shi'i when shown explicitly, as is 'the sword of Ali', Dhū al-Faqār/Zolfaqar (Plate 17); the lion (of Ali);[55] the *panje* (the Shi'i hand of *hazrat-e 'Abbās*, with the names of the *panj tan*);[56] the *'eyn-e 'Alī*,[57] etc. Particularly impressive is the representation on small silver or brass 'masks' of the face of *hazrat-e'Abbās* (Figure 98), worn as a pendant or *bāzū-band,* probably during Muharram and in particular for Ashura, but maybe not exclusively on that occasion.[58]

Regarding Iranian jewellery, which is sometimes used as a talisman, the turquoise (*firūze*), which is typically Iranian – the mines of Neyshabur have been considered since antiquity to be the best in the world – can obviously also be considered a Shi'i stone: Najafī quotes a prayer of the Twelve Imams, attributed to Nasīr al-dīn Tūsī, recommended to be

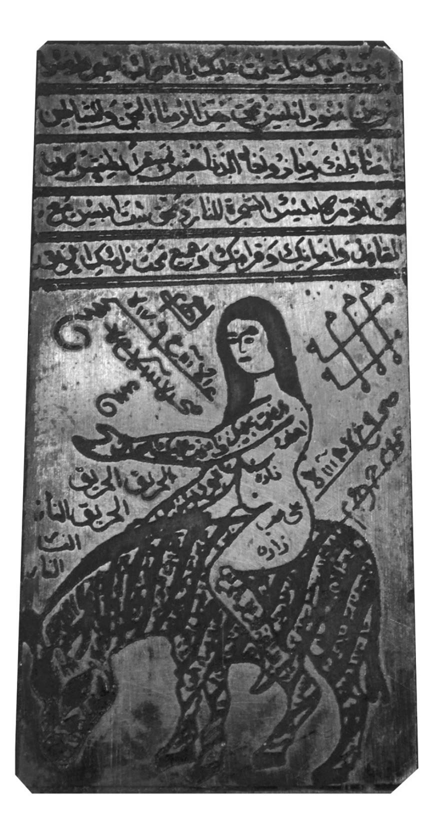


Figure 94 Rectangular talisman for obtaining love and control representing a woman riding a donkey covered and surrounded by inscriptions (copper alloy). © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

said with a ring bearing carnelian (literally agate, ʻ*aqīq*, the stone of the Prophet Mohammad) and turquoise.[59] The use of 'the pearl of Najaf' (*dorr-e Najaf*), white quartz engraved with the religious inscriptions *Amīr al-Moʻmenīn* and *nād-e ʻAliyyān*, is clearly Shiʻi; other stones that are popular in the Iranian Shiʻi milieu, besides the green *shāh maqsūd* (jade[60]) used for rosaries (*tasbīh*s), seem to be today the white spinel (*laʻl*), maybe to recall the ʻ*dorr-e Najaf*', and *ʻaqīq-e soleymānī* (probably sardonyx). Donaldson considers the necklace *chehel besmellāh*, made of inscribed silver leaves, to be a classical protective item common in Iran,[61] but it is not necessarily exclusive to a Shiʻi context; this is probably also true in the case of locks or padlocks, which are often associated with holy Shiʻi shrines.[62]

As has been frequently observed by scholars, written devices are not necessarily transposed into material objects and vice versa,[63] as can be seen,

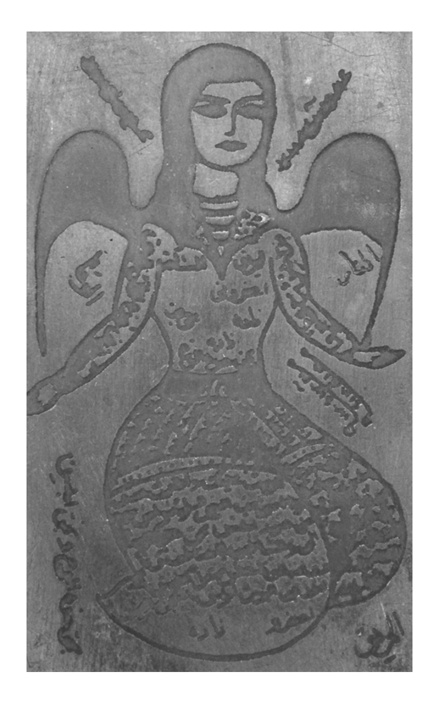


Figure 95 Rectangular talisman for obtaining love (?) representing a seated woman with wings (copper alloy). © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.



Figure 96 Talismanic painting of a couple, a heart and a fish represented on a horse's skull. © Iran Bastan Museum, Department of Ethnology.



Figure 97 Silver necklace with two gazelles and two birds turning their backs. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.



Figure 98 Pendant representing the face of *hazrat-e* ʻAbbās (copper alloy). © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005.

for instance, in the case of numerous magico-medicinal bowls.[64] The Museum of the History of Medicine[65] in Tehran possesses a bowl engraved with Shiʻi elements, a description of the composition of bowl patterns apparently absent from written sources. The central magical square (Figure 99),[66] eight by eight, is surrounded by 12 circles with religious inscriptions; 12 smaller squares with magical squares, four by four; and 12 small triangles with the names of the signs of the zodiac. The surrounding inscription near the rim gives the names of the Twelve Imams with their *laqab*s.[67]

Iranian culture has always rather accorded priority to divination (*fāl*), especially by book,[68] which undoubtedly accounts for the relatively little

239	275	278	**232**	**231**	283	286	**224**
277	**233**	**238**	276	285	**225**	**230**	284
234	280	273	**237**	**226**	288	281	**229**
274	**236**	**235**	279	282	**228**	**227**	287
255	259	262	**248**	**247**	267	270	**240**
261	**249**	**254**	260	269	**241**	**246**	268
250	264	257	**253**	**242**	272	265	**245**
258	**252**	**251**	263	266	**244**	**243**	271

Figure 99 Magical square.

attention paid to magical objects. If their learned inscriptions and graphical elaborations, such as diagrams, squares and scripts, belong to the past culture, they are still vivid, having been transmitted for a millennium in various written compilations, as in Najafī's trilogy. On the contrary, the figurative representations on the majority of recent Iranian talismans appear extremely original compared to ancient models. As such they are worth studying in the framework of the debate on the evolution of the image in the Islamic world, for the themes they develop as well as for their independent aesthetic style.[69]

NOTES

1. For instance, al-Bīrūnī 1934, see §359–371 and §396–435; for the old Persian translation, see Bīrūnī 1367.
2. A syncretic approach to these aspects (e.g. Massé 1930; Doutté 1984; Omidsalar 1991; Regourd & Lory 1992; Ruska & de Vaux 2000; Fahd 2002; Hamès 2007; Tanavoli 1385) can also benefit from diachronic and systematised analyses of separate collections: e.g. Kalus 1981.
3. For both aspects, see Vesel, '*Al-Sirr*' and *Textes* (forthcoming).
4. I cite here only some of the studies on Sabeism (e.g. Dodge 1970, vol. II, pp. 745–773). For a more complete bibliography, see Vesel, '*Al-Sirr*' (forthcoming).
5. Marquet, 'Sabéens' 1966.
6. Ritter & Plessner 1962.
7. Heinrichs 1995; Barthold 1977, p. 501, note 53; for the treatise, see, for instance, Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Walker 91 (212 fols.).

8. For extant copies of the Arabic text, see Kholeif 1966, p. 202. See, for instance, BnF, Paris: MS Ar. 2645.
9. Vesel 1994; Storey 1972. At least two other MSS should be added under this entry: University of Aligarh, MS Coll. Abdus-Salam; Institute of Oriental Studies-Biruni, Tashkent, MS 1350.
10. Schmitz & Desai 2006, pp. 20–27, pl. 13–19.
11. ps.-Avicenna 1331; see also Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Persian 100 (fols. 15b–30a).
12. Storey 1977, pp. 474–475 (nos. 835/3).
13. Caiozzo 2000.
14. See Caiozzo 2003 for rich pictorial documentation on planets.
15. See Vesel, '*Al-Sirr*' (forthcoming).
16. Tomtom Hendī is the legendary author of various occult arts: see Hauber 1909; Ullmann 1972, pp. 298–299; Sezgin 1979, pp. 96–97. For the illustration of 'Indian degrees', see Schmitz & Desai 2006, note 10 supra (i.e. Persian translation of *al-Sirr* by F. Rāzī) and Tourkin 2003; the latter text, on cosmography and astrology (MS Pers. 373), does not specify that degrees are used in magic, contrary to Rāzī's *al-Sirr* and 'degrees by Teucros', where this is stated clearly.
17. For the author and his works, see Ullmann 1972, pp. 278–279; Sezgin 1979, pp. 71–73. For the Arabic version of 'degrees by Teucros' attributed to him, see Fahd 1975; for its Persian translation, probably dating from the twelfth century but preserved only in a seventeenth-century illustrated copy, see *Tangelūshā* 2537 shsh and *Tanklūshā* 1383.
18. The hypothesis of the Iranian pre-Islamic origin of the treatise on (pseudo-) Teucros's degrees was advanced by R. Homāyun-Farrokh (see his introduction to *Tangelūshā* 2537 shsh); it is reasonable to suppose the existence of an illustrated version. However, the only version historically attested to in Iran is the one on 36 decans (and not on 360 degrees), translated from the authentic Greek treatise by Teucros into Middle Persian (Panaino 1987, pp. 131–137). The version translated from Middle Persian to Arabic was incorporated into Abū Ma'shar's *al-Mudkhal* (Abū Ma'shar 1995–6, vol. III, chapter 6, 1).
19. Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 135–139.
20. Gyselen 1995.
21. Savage-Smith 1997, p. 133. I have chosen not to discuss here this image, which has acquired a strong political dimension in Iran since the nineteenth century. See Kasravī 1930; Shani 2006.
22. Kunitzsch 1987.
23. See Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Whinfield 57, fols. 78–194.
24. Caiozzo 2000, p. 111.
25. They are depicted, for instance, in Abū Ma'shar's works (Carboni 1988a and b), or on the illustrated cloth of Indian provenance, covered with inscriptions in Persian (Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 152–153). See also Caiozzo 2003, pp. 331–345.

26. For correspondences, see, for example, Caiozzo 2003 and note 1 supra.
27. Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 88–90.
28. Ritter & Plessner 1962, see *maqāla* II, *fasl* 11.
29. Abū Ma‘shar 1995–6, chapter VI, 1.
30. Apparently, the knowledge of ‘images’ of decans in Iran followed the current knowledge of astronomy/astrology. For instance, Bīrūnī, in his *Tafhīm,* prefers to refer in detail to decan-lords (i.e. the planets that govern them) of various traditions and only very briefly to genuine decans, each possessing an imaginary ‘image’ (al-Bīrūnī 1934, pp. 262–263, §449–451; idem 1367, pp. 403–405).
31. Contrary to genuine decans, decan-lords (i.e. planets) are depicted in Islamic – namely Iranian – manuscripts, such as in Abū Ma’shar’s *Book of Nativities* (Carboni 1987; idem 1988a).
32. Hartner 1938; Caiozzo 2003, pp. 213–229.
33. Ullmann 1972, pp. 419–420.
34. Storey 1977, pp. 457–458 (no. 802). See, for example, Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Whinfield 57 (fols. 1–78); MS Pers. *c.* 22 (fols. 163–239).
35. See *Telesm-e Eskandariyye*, n.d.
36. Kāshefī, n.d.; see Lory 2003.
37. See in comparison the illustrations of the chapter on ‘*Tebb-e ruhāni dar ’elāj al-amrāz*’, in *Kashf al-sanāye’*, 1322 (see *Telesm-e Eskandariyye*, n.d.*: Kashf* follows *Telesm* in the Indian lithography), pp. 90–103. For introductory information on this important text, see Afshar 1998, p. 162 and Afkari 1998.
38. See, for instance, Fahd 1997.
39. *Konūz-e Hoseynī* 1332.
40. Najafī, n.d., *Kashkūl*, p. 277 sqq.
41. Gyselen 1995.
42. Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 135–139.
43. For instance, see Rührdanz 2002.
44. For its depiction, see, for instance, Abū Ma‘shar’s *Kitāb al-mawālīd* (Book of Nativities) (BnF, Paris: MS Ar. 2583, fol. 2r); Carboni 1986.
45. This term is used by Najafī, n.d., *Jāme‘*, p. 290.
46. See de Bruijn & Boratav 1993.
47. I thank the Department of Ethnology of the Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, for providing me (in May 2004) with the photos of this exceptional item.
48. This association somehow recalls l’Archédémon ‘guérisseur’ (the archdemon ‘healer’), who is surrounded with animals including the scorpion and the snake (Gyselen 1995, pp. 28–29). The rooster on the archdemon’s ‘Caducea’ stick might be explained by the legend of Gayomarth (where the rooster fights against snakes or serpents; see Lazard 1956, pp. 206 and 211).
49. For this figure in pre-Islamic Iran, see Gyselen 1995, in particular pp. 27, 29 and 53; and on ninth- to thirteenth–century Iranian talismans, see Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 135–139.

50. Ghirshman 1962, p. 1 (and illustration on the facing page). I thank Claire Hardy for this reference.
51. *Yavāqīt* 1345, p. 207 (and chapter 24 in general); Najafī, n.d., *Jāme'*, pp. 122–123 and 257; Panaino 2004, p. 196, note 1.
52. For some examples, see Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 144–147.
53. Najafī, n.d., *Jāme'*, *Kashkūl* and *Konūz*.
54. British Library, London: MS 3648, in particular chapter 9.
55. Shani 2006.
56. Calmard & Allan 1985, p. 789, fig. 28.
57. I thank P. Lory for interpreting the image of '*eyn-e 'Alī*: 'The name of Allah in the centre and the name of Ali on the periphery are the manifestation of the divine in his Creation, source of all power (including the talismanic one) and the way to the truth for all created beings.' For the image, see Najafī, n.d., *Jāme'*, p. 386.
58. Vesel 2006.
59. Najafī, n.d., *Jāme'*, p. 63.
60. This green stone – indicated by Iranians and Afghans as jade – is of Afghan provenance.
61. Donaldson 1938; see the illustration facing the title page.
62. Stanley 1997, p. 356 sqq.
63. Savage-Smith 2004, pp. xv–xvi.
64. Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 72–104. Interestingly, Sakkākī's MS at Bodleian L. (Walker 91; supra, note 7) contains a depiction of the bowl (*al-tās*; fols. 31b–32a), nevertheless without a specification of a pattern to engrave on it.
65. National Museum of the History of Medical Sciences of Iran (Mūze-ye Melli-ye Tārīkh-e 'Olūm-e Pezeshkī Jomhurī-ye Eslāmi-ye Irān).
66. I thank J. Sesiano for reading and reconstructing this square. See, for example, Sesiano 2003; idem 2004.
67. I thank Fariba Afkari for having read the inscriptions.
68. Savage-Smith 1997, pp. 154–156.
69. I wish to thank Hamidreza Vassaf – who is preparing a PhD thesis at the University of Lyon 2 titled 'Iranian Amulets in French Public Collections' – for having checked the reading of the talismans published in this chapter.

Institutional abbreviations

MuCEM Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Mediterranée, Marseille, France

BnF Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France

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Abbreviations:

E.Ir. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*

E.I. *Encyclopedie de l'Islam*

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